

A
DISSERTATION
ON THE
NATURE, EFFECTS, and CONSEQUENCES
OF THE
BLASPHEMY against the HOLY GHOST.

To which is added,

A REVIEW of the REASONINGS in
MONSIEUR BAYLE,

On the Entrance of SIN and MISERY into the World.

And on the Method prescribed by him for conducting this
Dispute with a MANICHEAN.

TOGETHER WITH

Remarks on an Anonymous Book, intituled, A Free Inquiry
into the Nature and Origin of Evil.

By S. MARTIN, M. A. Rector of Gotham in Nottinghamshire,
and some time Fellow of Oriel College, Oxford.

Ματθ. 23ος ἀνδρες αἰτιολογεῖτε ἐξ ἑαυτῶν φάρμακοι κακὰ σφίσι καὶ
οἱ δὲ καὶ αὐτοί, σφίσι εἰς ἡλιθιότητας, εἰς ἀφροσύνας καὶ ἁμαρτίας,
ὑπερ μέρους αὐτῶν ἔχουσιν
Plat. Alcib. Secundus, Ed. Serzani, T. ii. p. 142.

L O N D O N.

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TO
CHARLES JENNINS, Esquire.

S I R,

THE following dissertation was drawn up in hopes of preventing or removing some mistakes in well-meaning men on the one hand, and giving a check to the growing outrage of wilful and malicious enemies to Christianity on the other. He must know but little of the world, that can think the subject unseasonable; and if I have not err'd in the account of it's nature and effects, we may hope it will be in some degree useful.

Religious liberty is the Birth-right of man as a rational and accountable creature: yet great as the blessing is,

it may be perverted to the most pernicious purposes. There is, we know, a *Religious Licentiousness*, as well as a *Religious Liberty*; and no set of men are more assiduous to infuse their poison into others, than they who would root up foundations, and overturn every thing. The more liberty therefore calls for the more attention and diligence from ourselves, the more zeal to preserve our faith inviolate, on which we have an infinite interest depending; a zeal, not indeed of persecution, but of labour and love, to lay open the frauds and false reasonings devised to ensnare unwary and unstable men. When I speak of such danger amongst ourselves, and the peculiar necessity of guarding against the growing mischief, I would not be understood to mark out our own times as eminently worse than past ages. Human corruption work'd then, and it operates now: but it would be unjust to our age not to acknowledge
 distin-

distinguishing national virtues amongst us, as well as reigning vices. Of the former, a benevolent disposition and readiness to relieve the wants of the distressed, and a most laudable zeal and generosity, on all proper occasions, for promoting industry and public utility, have been justly remark'd as characters of the present times, beyond the example of those that have gone before us.

But who would not grieve to see so excellent a turn at any time fall short of its best merit, unactuated, as it must be acknowledged sometimes to be, by religious motives, unenliven'd by the spirit of Christian principles, which alone could render it a sacrifice unblemished in the sight of God?

Your own steady attachment to Christ and Christianity, none, that know You, can be ignorant of; and therefore it is with the justest approbation and pleasure, that we remark

how the world may be brought to
in

in Your example what stamps its truest worth upon it, and cannot lose its perfect reward.

Permit me, therefore, to take this opportunity of adding my warmest wishes for length of days to You in that course of honour and virtue which You are happily pursuing, diffusing the blessings of Your ample fortune, which God hath given, and Religion taught you the true use of, to every good office of piety and charity; the encouragement of learning and arts, and whatever may either mend the heart, or enlarge and cultivate the understanding; and in all this, acting through the whole on the purest principles, cherishing and ripening moral virtues into divine graces, upon the only sure rule, the doctrine and precepts of Christianity.

In the discharge of this so reasonable and excellent service, till called away to receive the reward of it in a better world, may the comforts and
aids

[ix]

oids of Christianity smooth the passage
through the present infirm state, to
You, and all that, like You, love the
Lord Jesus in sincerity.

I am,

S I R,

Your most obliged,

and most affectionately

obedient humble servant,

S. MARTIN.

ADVERTISEMENT.

IN a discourse of this nature, in which sundry points are to be stated, and distinctly proved, it is impossible that some remarks should not be necessary, of which every one, for whose use it is intended, cannot be supposed a competent judge. The less learned reader will look upon himself as not concerned in these; and therefore his ease and convenience is particularly consulted, by separating, for the greater part, things of this sort from the discourse itself, and throwing them into notes; by which disposition he may proceed with what may be useful to himself, without interruption or perplexity.

CON.

C O N T E N T S.

C H A P. I.

The Nature of Blasphemy against the Holy Ghost stated and explained. p. 11

C H A P. II.

The following questions discussed, First, Whether the Pharisees, in charging our Saviour with casting out Devils by Beelzebub, the Prince of the Devils, were actually guilty of blaspheming the Holy Ghost. Secondly, Whether at this time it be possible for a man to commit this Sin. p. 43

C H A P. III.

The effects of this Blasphemy, on the state of the Blasphemer, both in this world, and the world to come. p. 60

C H A P. IV.

The Goodness and Mercy of God vindicated in this respect. p. 77

C H A P. V.

Whether, and how far, ourselves may presume to pass our judgment in this case. b In

[*]

In which chapter are considered also the principal causes and leadings to this sin. p. 90

CHAP. VI.

The great use to weak and timid minds rightly to apprehend the nature of it. p. 111

Review of some Reasonings of *Monf. Bayle*, and in the *Free Inquiry*,

Part I.

p. 119

Part II.

p. 171

CHAP. VII.

The effects of this blasphemy on the state of the Blasphemer, both in this world, and the world to come. p. 180

CHAP. VIII.

The Goodness and Mercy of God vindicated. p. 187

DIS-

CHAP. IX.

Whether, and how far, our conduct is to be judged in this case. p. 194

A

DISSERTATION, &c.

INTRODUCTION.

THE author is obliged to acknowledge, however unfavourable it may be to himself, that he knows not any religious subject of importance so rarely discussed amongst us, as that of *the sin or blasphemy against the Holy Ghost*. Other points, either curiosity, or their real or but supposed utility, bring under frequent inquiry; but this is seldom stated, and so little is commonly known or agreed concerning it, that a man would be inclined to think, there must be somewhat very difficult, or very dangerous in any researches into it; whence it seems to be reserved, by a sort of general consent, for men of rare and choice abilities to define and explain it; but as to ordinary Christians, to be a subject too nice and slippery for them to look into at all, or to concern themselves about it.

2 INTRODUCTION.

— If this be really the case, I shall want a better apology, than I am able to offer for my engaging in it. What I have to plead is, that, had it been a matter of curiosity only; if I were not myself, as a Christian, concerned in such inquiry; if, upon examination, I had not found that from scripture might be collected a clear and satisfactory account of it; and were I not further persuaded, that this account would be so far from raising needless scruples and doubts in men's minds, that it has the directest tendency to prevent or remove them, I had saved myself the time and trouble of writing what follows, and every one else that may be led by the Title to look into it, all danger of a disappointment from it.

But could we suppose it best for common Christians not to meddle at all in a subject that is so little understood by them, and is thought so much above them; yet this we know and see, that many have not sufficient caution, nor any such apprehension of evil consequences, as to restrain them from it; the inquisitiveness of human nature, or vanity, or even religious fears and extreme tenderness, will, right or wrong, here as well as in other instances, find itself work: and possibly they who are least fit to judge, be the most forward to do it. Hence it comes to pass that the nature of this sin is often mistaken; and the mistake has sometimes driven men

INTRODUCTION.

3

not only into great perplexities about the state of their souls, but into the most distressful of terrors. Must we then give up these people to their own wretchedness? must we leave the matter to take it's course with others that may follow them? or, if expedients are to be tried, shall we forbid all further enquiry; a method, that rarely has any other effect than to whet men's appetites, and make them the more eager about it? On the other hand, since the mischiefs above-mentioned in no sort arise from the subject itself, but from mere misapprehension, or foolish fancies; the most effectual way to remove these, as well as the safest and justest, must be, to make the matter, if it can be done, plainer and easier, and thereby better understood. Whether, or how far, what follows may contribute to this end, is submitted to the judicious and candid reader. If the subject is rightly stated, and explained as it ought; that is, intelligibly, and in a manner suitable to the general concern of it; then I shall have the satisfaction of shewing to the plain serious Christian, what perhaps he may have some distrust or doubts about, that it is not a matter too high even for *Him*; that he may safely look into, and understand, what his Lord and Master delivered with the greatest solemnity, and the highest sanction*; and

* Mar. iii. 28. "Verily I say unto you," &c.

easily discover the state of his own soul in this particular; in a word, may both know what the evil is, and at the same time be impressed with the strongest sense, how infinitely he is concerned to guard against it. But if, on the other hand, I shall be found to have fallen into any mistakes on this subject (for it above all behoved me to weigh this too), still, I trust, they may not be such, as can affect the whole; that they relate only to some less considerable parts, and cannot draw after them any bad consequences on the minds, or manners of men. Notwithstanding some errors of this sort, the nature of the task will, to all ingenuous men, excuse an attempt to cast some further light upon a subject, in which all of us are concerned; which yet the greater part have either very wrong, or very imperfect notions of; and with regard to which they have within their reach fewer helps to gain information from, than possibly, upon any one other matter of consequence in the whole compass of the Christian Religion.

CHAP I.

WHEN our blessed Saviour made his appearance amongst the Jews, as their Messiah, he found them strongly prepossessed by sundry prejudices of such nature, as must of course be great impediments, either to the acknowledging his person, or embracing his doctrine. Of these a principal one respects their national religion, which was now greatly fallen from it's original purity: the rituals and shell of their law were considered as the substance, though they were really but shadows of better things; such of their precepts as were easy and shewy, or which could be performed without parting with any favourite lust or passion, on these they rested their duty and their hopes, and would perform them with singular scrupulosity and accuracy; whilst at the same time they foolishly trusted by this means to commute for the breach of the weightier commandments, or had learnt evasions and distinctions to strip them of their obligation: and what had mightily contributed to forward all this mischief, an heap of superstitious observances had been long introduced amongst them, of mere human invention, and which they and their fathers, for generations, had been taught to revere, as the injunctions of God, coeval with their written law, sacred and obligatory

no less than *that*, and in some momentous instances even superseding it.

But the malady stopt not here; there was still another prejudice likely to defeat the very remedy God's mercy intended for these inveterate evils; it was for the Messiah, that the great work of reforming, and, in the highest and perfectest sense, restoring all things, was reserved; all that had grace or goodness in them, at those corrupted times, nay the corrupted themselves, were ready enough to say, ^b "When the Messiah is come, he will tell us all things"; but even of this Messiah they had been trained to conceive such false, and debasing ideas; had so misconstrued the marks and characters by which the Prophets had described him, that it would be difficult to know him when he came; as sons of Abraham, they imagined to themselves an indefeasible right in his blessings, and a portion in his kingdom; this kingdom they regarded more as what would make them great on earth, than happy in Heaven; and of himself they had nothing so strong in their minds, as a Prince going forth (but in a worldly sense) "conquering, and to conquer"; a deliverer, that should break the Roman yoke, make Jerusalem Queen of Cities, and themselves lords of the world. And could such good things as these come out of Nazareth? could he be a Prophet of

^b John iv. 25.

^c Rev. vi. 2.

God, that set at naught such a corner-stone of their religion, as the Oral law; and who presumed to vilify their great doctors, and holy observers of it? could he be that son of David that was to head their armies, and lead them to glory and victory, who was but the son of an obscure carpenter, and himself a carpenter, ^a without power or friends, and even without the ambition or spirit to make them? These were notions of the tenderest and most affecting kind; they had taken long and deep root; extremely flattered their national vanity; their interests and pleasures were greatly concerned in them; and every wordly consideration conspired to blind their eyes, that they should not see Jesus in his own true light; nor regard their prophecies in that just and rational sense which the Prophets most certainly intended, though they might sometimes express spiritual matters by sensible images, a thing, which (not to enquire here into the several great ends, which the wisdom and providence of God had to answer thereby) was in some measure unavoidable, from the nature of language, the narrowness of our ideas, and more eminently the peculiar figurative turn of the people of the East.

Under these circumstances he began his office, and, like one who came to seek, and to save what was lost, with all imaginable

^a Mar. vi. 3.

B 4

meekness

8 *Of the BLASPHEMY against*

meekness and tenderness accommodates himself to their infirmity; he labours to recover them gradually from their prejudices, and not only in his sermons and discourses to them, endeavours to form their minds to such sentiments of piety and probity, as would best fit them for the reception of truth; but to the most consummate wisdom added all the recommendations of the most perfect and unblemished holiness. But their corruptions had got too strong possession of them to be easily, or soon extirpated; and so far were many of them from paying due respect to the great errand he came about, and the evidences of his mission, that they despised and reproached his person, put the most unjust construction on his doctrine, and calumniated his moral conduct, as if he were a glutton, and wine-bibber, a friend of publicans and sinners; and, what at length made up the full complement of their calumnies against him, they said he had a devil. It must be a matter of moment to ascertain the meaning of the last of these insults; because, it being, as I apprehend, the utmost boundary of the blasphemy against the Son of Man, when that is properly fixed, it is a great point gained towards the settling the just precise notion of the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost; as on the other hand, the extending it's boundaries too far must, as experience has shewn, of course lead us to confound the two blasphemies, by making something

thing a part of blasphemy against the Son, which appertains only to, or is part of, the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost.

The imputation of being a Demoniack is no less than four several times cast upon Jesus personally, as the Son of Man^e; and in every one we find from the context and occasion, that, under the general charge of a possession, there is still something more peculiarly intended, which is either madness, or falsehood and calumny: it was evidently the former of these, that the Jews had specially respect to, in the case of John the Baptist, when on account of his superlative abstinence and mortification, he was traduced as a Demoniack by them^f; and with the same view, as we learn from the text itself, the same reproach is thrown upon Jesus (John x. 20.) and is thus expressed, "he hath a devil, and is mad," i. e. he is possessed, and the effect of the possession is madness; and therefore what immediately follows, "why hear ye him?" is most properly suited to the case of one

* It is to be noted that under these four, there is not included the instance in St. Mark, c. iii. 30. where the having an *unclean spirit*, is charged upon our Saviour on occasion of his casting out devils; as neither the other parallel places, where he is said to have Beelzebub, and to cast out devils by him; all which are cases of another class, and not to be applied here, as will be fully shewn in their due order.

^f Mat. xi. 18.

distracted,

distracted, as if they had said, Who would mind the ravings of a mad man?

In other instances the plain and principal design of the abuse is, to set him out, in the strongest colours, as a profane reprobate, or a bold liar: thus in John, Chap. vii. ver. 19, 20, when he had reproved the Jews for aiming to kill him, they retort upon him, that "he had a devil;" the natural and obvious drift and intent of which reply, if we consider the occasion on which it was spoke, must be acknowledged to be, in like manner as in the former case, that he was under the influence of an evil spirit, and in consequence thereof had invented a wicked falsity, in the very spirit of the father of lies; for, as they sufficiently imply in their answer, they had no such intention, they did not go about to kill him.

Again in Chap. viii. the 37th and following ver. he shews them the vanity of their pretensions, as the seed of Abraham, whose true children he denies they were; and plainly tells them they did the works of the devil, and that therefore he was their father. Upon this, stung with the just censure, to which their own consciences could not but bear testimony, they break out afresh upon him; "Say we not well, Thou art a Samaritan," i. e. of Samaritan manners, a deserter from

God, a slanderer of his church, “ and hast a “ devil,” or art of that false and lying disposition, which thou imputeest to us, and which may more justly denominate thyself a child of the devil? There remains but one other instance of this abuse; and it is a repetition of that I have last mentioned, during the continuance of Christ’s discourse with the Jews, and comprehends both the senses of it. Upon their uttering it the first time in this conversation, Jesus denying the charge endeavours to awaken them, to reflect on the guilt and consequences of their conduct, by letting them see, how much their vile aspersions injured themselves; that the only true way to be happy was to obey him, “ for, “ says he, If a man keep my saying, he shall “ never see death.” Yet this too they take by a wrong handle, injuriously pervert the sense and meaning of it, and from thence would argue him guilty, not only of falsehood and lying, as before, but of such *mad* extravagance, that they express it, with greater confidence than ever, by a *possession*^h. “ Now we “ know that thou hast a devil, Abraham is “ dead, and the Prophets are dead;” can thy preaching or word do that for others, which the holiness of those most perfect of men could not do for themselves? False therefore, their argument supposes, it must be,

^h ver. 52.

that the keeping his saying should make a man immortal; and the *maddest* of all falsities, openly to advance such an untruth as every man that hears it is able to confute by known and incontestable facts.—In all these several instances of imputed possession, it is easy to observe, that the charge had not the least view or direction to any miracles that had been performed: it was a sudden vent of rage and passion against Jesus personally, for having exposed their pride and hypocrisy; and there is this proof of all miracles being out of their thoughts at the time, that in the instance from the viith ch. of St. John, when our Saviour at the 21st ver. in vindication of himself from such an abuse, appealed to a late miracle, which he had done before them, they make no reply, but as refuted, drop the debate; and, in like mannerⁱ, when a division arose amongst them upon it, and some of them less rash and impious than the rest, shewed them the absurdity of the charge, by putting them in mind of another miracle he had performed but just before, upon a man born blind, they are again silenced at once; whereas, had they conceived any intention of charging him with doing his miracles by the assistance of the devil, it was impossible they could acquiesce in the argument, or admit the miracle itself for any proof, that he had not a devil.

ⁱ Ch. x. 19, &c.

Upon the whole, we may, from the evidences already produced, ascertain the just and full sense of the blasphemy against the Son of man; that it comprehended in the first place all those lower flouts, that were passed upon his parentage, his country, his occupation, his mean education^{*}; which last afforded indeed great matter of astonishment to the Jews, how he attained such skill in the scriptures, yet, God knows, ended with most of them in a foolish wonder, without the rational attention, and just effects it ought to have produced in them. But more eminently are here to be understood the higher abuses, upon his understanding, as frantic and disordered; upon his doctrine and preaching, as futile or false; and on his moral character, as impious and profane; that he was a despiser of the law, a breaker of the sabbath, one that had affirmed the greatest falsehoods with regard to *them*, and assumed the most unjustifiable honours to *himself*. To complete these abuses, and as the sum total of all, they added that he had a devil, of which deplorable state there were at that time frequent instances amongst them, and which they saw attended with those very circumstances of madness and wickedness, which they so much desired to fasten upon him.

^{*} John vii. 15.

14 *Of the BLASPHEMY against*

We know not any thing of higher enormity, that can be placed to the account of this blasphemy; every outrage that has proceeded further, has changed it's rank, and belongs to another matter; but so far as the instances above recited, these are certainly to be referred to what scripture, with great propriety, distinguishes by the name of blasphemy against the Son of Man, being an insult upon him in his lower capacity, and as man; and therefore, however insolent and daring it was, it did not render a man's state immediately desperate; it would with regard to these very Jews, as Christ's own account of it supposes, be forgiven to human infirmity, and the force of prejudice, if they stopt here, and returned with suitable repentance and conversion, which they might do, and, in some instances, undoubtedly did: but there was a further guilt; and if, instead of retreating, they proceeded from blaspheming the Son of Man, to blaspheme the Spirit of God, there was then no remedy; the virulence of the blasphemy having once attained it's height and maturity, in the several parts and branches of it, the sin and misery of it's author was from thence absolutely fixed and irrecoverable.

And can we then be more interested in any thing than to be assured of the nature and avoid the effects of so mighty and comprehensive a guilt, which carries irrevocable destruction in the act of it, and seals up
a man

a man to iniquity beyond all hope of reparation or retrieve? but especially, if at any time infidelity should become the fashionable vice; or, as may be the present case, a notion should obtain even amongst many believers, that the sin against the Holy Ghost is hardly, if at all, possible in these later ages; it cannot want it's use to shew, whither it is that any lengths of unbelief are likely to carry us; that, without an honest and upright heart, we are not out of all danger of falling into so desperate an estate; and that therefore it behoves us to guard with no little care and attention against the most poisonous source of all mischief, an *evil* heart of unbelief.

There have indeed been men, who have pretended (as what is there so absurd, or false, that some men have not pretended?) that scripture no where determines the precise nature of this sin, and that therefore it is fruitless for us to enquire about it. But could scripture, the most perfect rule of life, leave us in the dark in that very point, which we are most deeply concerned to be informed of? could it be consistent with the Divine mercy and equity to denounce the most terrible judgment imaginable on something we might possibly be guilty of, and not inform us what it was? We may dismiss therefore so irrational and wild a notion without observing, that it cannot be advanced with-

out

out derogating, from the justice of God, and the wisdom of the holy scriptures.

But it is just matter of wonder, and much more deserving our attention, that many sober and learned men, when they found the history of the thing so precisely related, and the fact which gave occasion to our Saviour's mentioning this sin evidently insisted upon, with a design to let us into the meaning of it, could yet imagine it to consist in something that bears no particular relation to that history, and is alike applicable to all sins. Such is the notion, that because scripture promises remission of sins to all those who are sincerely penitent, the sin against the Holy Ghost, which is irremissible, must therefore consist in a state of final impenitence.—It must be granted, that every sin, which we truly repent of, will be pardoned; we grant further that whoever arrives to such a pitch of wickedness as to commit the sin against the Holy Ghost, falls into a state of final impenitence; and therefore is incapable of having this sin remitted to him; yet it by no means follows that this final impenitence is itself the very sin against the Holy Ghost. Such impenitence flows indeed of course from it, and is always the effect of it, yet for that very reason it cannot be the thing itself, unless we would be so absurd as to suppose that the effect must be the same thing with the cause that produced it.

It

It is therefore with much greater probability affirmed by others, that this sin is the ascribing the miracles and supernatural gifts of the Spirit of God, or, as we commonly express it, of the Holy Ghost, to the operation of devils. And yet even in this sense some men, not attending to other parts of scripture that speak of, or have reference to it, have been led to confine it precisely to this single point of view, and thereby given too short and imperfect an account of it; whilst others, by supposing it to relate solely to the times when the miraculous powers of the Holy Ghost were exercised, and to the persons who actually saw them performed, have given occasion to the opinion that it is impossible for us at this time to be guilty of it.

To disengage ourselves out of this strange diversity of opinions, our only rule is to compare scripture with scripture, and explain the difficult and ambiguous texts of it by such as are more clear and precise, where they speak of the same subject. It is true, the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost is not mentioned *by name*, on any other occasion in scripture; and the several passages which speak of it, do not all consider it in the same point of view; but, as it has different branches, it is spoke of sometimes with respect to one, and sometimes to another; and the rule to distinguish what places are certainly to be understood of it, and thereby prevent all mis-

application, is the evident mark of unpardonableness set upon it by our Saviour¹, he having told us, that all other sins may be forgiven, but this never will; wherever therefore we find any thing declared absolutely irremissible, that we may be sure belongs to, and makes a part of it. These I shall lay together in one view; from which method, though it may, in the course of this subject, cause some repetition, yet, I presume, the following advantages may arise from it,—that having the scripture plan of this sin constantly before us, nothing may be omitted on the one hand that makes a just part of it, nor on the other any thing be affixed thereto, that is foreign, and does not belong to it.—In the next place, that the several accounts or descriptions thus laid together may more strongly explain, and mutually reflect their light upon each other—and upon the whole, that this plan may be both the foundation and the test of all we shall offer concerning this sin.

¹ The misinterpreting this one quality, as if no more was meant by it, than that it will be very difficultly forgiven, has caused greater error and wandering on this subject, than all other things put together; and no wonder, for it is the leading character, the very criterion to distinguish it by, in all other places of scripture. See the next chapter, where the import and force of the sanction, “*shall not be forgiven, neither in this world, neither in the world to come,*” is particularly considered.

To begin therefore where we first find it mentioned. The Jews had upon our Saviour's casting out a devil imputed this work to assistance received from the prince of devils; upon which our Saviour makes the following declaration; ^m "All manner of
 " sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto
 " men; but the blasphemy against the Holy
 " Ghost shall not be forgiven unto men: and
 " whosoever speaketh a word against the Son
 " of Man, it shall be forgiven him; but
 " whosoever speaketh against the Holy Ghost,
 " it shall not be forgiven him, neither in
 " this world, neither in the world to come." The same declaration upon the same occasion, or at least an occasion of the same nature, is recorded likewise by St. Mark ⁿ,
 " Verily I say unto you, all sins shall be for-
 " given unto the sons of men, and blasphe-
 " mies wherewith soever they shall blas-
 " pheme; but he that shall blaspheme against
 " the Holy Ghost, hath never forgiveness,
 " but is in danger of eternal damnation:" and then immediately follows, what deserves a particular attention, (and will be considered hereafter, p. 23.) the reason why our blessed Saviour mentioned this sin here, and denounced the dreadful sentence upon it, "Be-
 " cause they said, he hath an unclean spirit."

^m Matth. xii. 31, 32.

ⁿ Chap. iii. 28, 29.

There is nothing that is more particular in St. Luke on this head, and St. John in his gospel mentions it not at all. We hear nothing farther of the unpardonable sin, till we come to the sixth chap. of the Epistle to the Hebrews, 4th, 5th, and 6th verses, where though we have it represented under another view, yet we may be sure, from the unfailing token of impossibility of recovering out of it, that it is the very same sin. The words are, “ It is impossible for those who were once
“ enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the
“ Holy Ghost, and have tasted the good
“ word of God, and the powers of the world
“ to come; if they shall fall away, to renew
“ them again to repentance.—Seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and
“ put him to an open shame.” Again in the tenth chapter of the same epistle verse 26, we find a further light thrown upon our subject, from a circumstance of very great importance in ascertaining the nature of it; “ If
“ we sin wilfully, after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there
“ remaineth no more sacrifice for sins, but a
“ certain fearful looking for of judgment,
“ and fiery indignation;” and then after pointing out the penalty of apostatising from Moses’s law, he adds, “ Of how much sorer
“ punishment, suppose ye, shall he be
“ thought

“ thought worthy, who hath trodden under
 “ foot the Son of God, and counted the blood
 “ of the covenant, wherewith he was sanc-
 “ tified, an unholy thing, and done despite to
 “ the Spirit of grace ?” — The last text we
 find descriptive of this sin, is in the fifth chap.
 of St. John’s first Epistle, verse 16, where
 he informs us, “ There is a sin unto death ;”
 and speaks of it as precluding even the pray-
 ers of a christian brother for it ; “ I say not
 “ he shall pray for it.” This, one would
 think, is in a manner characteristic of the
 unpardonable guilt ; yet we offer it with
 caution and reserve, as the generality of ex-
 positors have chosen to give it a different turn.
 We shall have a proper opportunity in the
 course of our subject to enquire more into
 this matter ; and till then we beg the reader
 will suspend his judgment. As to the several
 other scriptural accounts that were produced
 immediately before it, those are all so express
 and demonstrative of this blasphemy, that
 they may with fullest assurance be depended
 upon ; and from them as we cannot doubt
 the precise nature of it may be collected, so
 I shall endeavour to do it in the following
 particulars.

In the first place then, the ascribing the
 miracles performed by the power of the Holy
 Ghost, to the assistance and power of the
 devil, is clearly from this view, which we
 find given us in scripture, one main and

principal branch of the sin against the Holy Ghost. The Evangelical History is the fullest evidence of this: Our Saviour had performed a miracle in casting out a devil;—This miracle was certainly the work of the Holy Ghost, for our Saviour himself tells us, he did it *ἐν Πνεύματι Θεοῦ*, ° by the spirit of God, or the power of the Holy Ghost;—And yet the Pharisees affirm the miracle was done by the assistance of the devil: whatever blasphemy therefore (for that is the name given in scripture, and received amongst the Jews for contumelies of such sort) was reflected in this, it was reflected mainly on the spirit of God, by ascribing what he had thus done, to the most wicked and abandoned of all beings. And as the sundry other revilings which had not respect to his miracles and the powers of the Spirit, were but revilings, against the Son of Man; so, as we have before observed, when this boundary was once past, when the insults proceeded to what was peculiarly the work of the Spirit of God, and the miracles themselves were attacked, not only the guilt immediately took a deeper dye, but the very kind of it was changed; in the same manner as if the commission of some royal ambassador, when opened and shewn to be amply authenticated, should yet be received with scoffs and ridicule, the af-

• Matth. xii. 28.

front in such case would be, not to the person of the ambassador, but to the majesty of him that sent him. Now the miracles were not the miracles of the Son of Man, but his credentials, and carried the stamp and seal of God upon them; the Son of Man indeed wrought them, but it was by the power of the Spirit of God; and therefore it was not he, but the very Spirit of God that was blasphemed by the insults thrown upon them. Hence it was that our Saviour took occasion immediately to give that warning to the world, that the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost should never be forgiven; and to this solemn declaration St. Mark, (chap. iii.) as we have already observed, subjoins this reason, "Because they said, he hath" that is, as it particularly signifieth in this place, *he acteth by* "an unclean spirit;" which taunt of their's carried in this case a much stronger sense than in the case of blasphemy against the Son of Man; being not intended for a bare reproach to his private person, but, as is most evident from the whole context, and the connexion of the reason assigned by the Evangelist with what gave occasion to it, they must have spoke it purely in relation to the powers under which he acted, and with peculiar respect to the miracle Christ had just before performed, of casting out an unclean spirit:

So that there is a concurrence here of all the main arguments that could help to ascertain the meaning of any text; to wit, the sense of the declaration itself; the context, with the occasion of it; and the remark that the Evangelist makes for the illustrating of this declaration; all which put together are ample evidence that to ascribe the miracles, which our blessed Saviour or his Apostles performed by the Spirit of God, to the operation of devils, must at least make one part or branch of the sin against the Holy Ghost.

2dly, The open renunciation of Christianity, and thereby of all the powers and graces of the Holy Ghost, is also another great branch of this deadly sin: for the proof of which I must repeat the passage from the sixth chap. of the Epistle to the Hebrews, which has been already produced in the general view, but must be here particularly considered; “It is impossible for them who were once
“enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of
“the Holy Ghost, and have tasted the good
“word of God, and the powers of the world
“to come; if they shall fall away, to renew
“them again to repentance; seeing they
“crucify to themselves the Son of God
“afresh, and put him to an open shame!” Upon which words we observe——1st. That they are certainly to be understood of the sin against the Holy Ghost, because impossibility

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of repentance, and consequently impossibility of pardon, is affirmed absolutely of all that fall into the guilt there mentioned.

2dly, That by being enlightened, by tasting of the heavenly gift, by being made partakers of the Holy Ghost, and tasting the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come, (however learned men may have varied as to the precise meaning of some of these particulars) thus much upon the whole is universally allowed to be intended in them, the being favoured with the knowledge and light of the gospel, made Christians through baptism, and partakers thereby of the comfortable privileges, and graces of it ^r.

3dly, That the falling away here has an evident relation to what immediately went before, and signifies the renouncing, and so the falling away, from all those blessed privileges and graces that had been before mentioned, from that light with which they had

^r If there is any obscurity in the particulars above, it is chiefly with respect to *the powers of the world to come*. A little attention to the language and sense of the Jews at that time will clear it up. It is well known that the principal thing intended by them under the noted phrase of *Yolam habbah* was the times of the Messiah; and both the phrase, and that particular sense of it prevailed amongst them from remote antiquity. To that the *αιων μελλων* here exactly and literally answers, and undoubtedly denotes the kingdom of Christ, or the age of the gospel; and by the powers of this age, we are to understand the gifts and graces which were so powerfully and plentifully shed down upon the church.

been

been enlightened, from that heavenly gift which they had tasted, from that Holy Ghost of which they had been partakers, and from that good word of God, and the powers of the world to come, which they had experienced; whence nothing less than a total apostasy and revolt from Christianity could be the thing intended: for as to applying it to every wilful and enormous sin after baptism, or even an habitual course of sinning, the rashness indeed of some men heretofore, to the great disturbance of Christianity, led them to do this, under the garb and appearance of greater sanctity; but it is so contrary to the plainest doctrine of scripture, and the express direction of St. Paul with regard to the incestuous Corinthian, that, like other unreasonable novelties and fancies of vain and ambitious men, it was not able to maintain itself, but has been long since, in a manner universally, discarded and laid aside.

Lastly, in further evidence that such falling away is really blaspheming the Holy Ghost, we must note the reason assigned, why the above-named abuses incur the extreme irrecoverable guilt; namely, that hereby “the wicked authors of them crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame;” the plain and natural meaning of which words is, that they pro-

Novatians, &c.

nounce

nounce by these abuses his punishment to have been just, that he was a cheat and impostor, and suffered only the demerit of his crimes.—But does not, it may be asked, such representation of things change the scene, and make the one unpardonable sin a different matter from what we had described, and scripture had pointed out before? and does not the reason we have just quoted turn upon the indignity offered to the Son of God? Can then a reproach upon the Son of God be the same sin with the blasphemy against the Spirit of God? In the case before us, I humbly apprehend, it is; for let it be observed, that it is not called a reproach to the Son of Man, but to the Son of God; to him, who, as the same Apostle speaks, Rom. i. 4. was declared the Son of God by the spirit of holiness, with power, that is, with mighty miracles; so that to renounce Christianity is to crucify the Son of God afresh; and to crucify him afresh is to blaspheme the miraculous powers, by which he was declared and notified to be the Son of God; and to do this is really to say that all the evidences he had produced of his mission were but frauds, or somewhat worse, the very works of Satan; which is surely to blaspheme not the Son of God only, but the whole œconomy of the redemption, and particularly that Holy Spirit, who bore witness to it by his miracles.—These two then ought to be
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considered, not as different independent sins, but only as different views of one and the same thing, and do always meet together, and actually suppose and infer each other: for whoever on the one hand has arrived to such a pitch of malignity, as to impute the miracles of christianity to the operation of the devil, cannot do this without the most violent and malicious opposition to the gospel, and a renunciation of christianity; as on the other, the spiteful opposers of the gospel, the malicious infidels, will of course impute all the miracles of the gospel either to imposture, or to magick and infernal arts, without which their infidelity would want the least shew of plausibility.—Notwithstanding therefore that unpardonableness is by our blessed Saviour himself appropriated to the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost; yet whatever directly includes it, must itself become unpardonable; though only because it comprises the other; which is the case here, inasmuch as such a total apostacy necessarily includes what constitutes that blasphemy, and could not take place without it.

If there yet remain any difficulty on this head, it is, what has been often affirmed, that nothing amounts to the irremissible sin but direct explicit words, ascribing, in terms, the miracles of the Holy Ghost to the power of Satan; and that nothing may be deemed such from construction, inference, or consequence

quence only. Now though such interpretation might consist with the account in the gospels, yet the several passages out of the epistles, which we have produced, will not admit of it; for notwithstanding the certain mark of the sin against the Holy Ghost is set upon each, yet in no one of them is that sin pointed out under terms directly imputing his miracles to the operation of devils; but through the whole, the insult on him or his miracles is either not peculiarly distinguished, but left to be deduced by just and rational inference from other matters there expressed, as in this sixth chap. to the Hebrews, the 4th and following verses; or it is mentioned conjunctly with the insults upon the Son of God, as mutually and necessarily connected with them; for instance in the tenth chap. of the same epistle, verse 29, where it is called "the treading under foot
 " the Son of God, the counting the blood
 " of the covenant, wherewith he (the very
 " profane person that does this) was sancti-
 " fied, an unholy thing, and *doing de-*
 " *spight to the spirit of grace.*" And the same passages induce us to conclude also, that to limit the sin absolutely to words spoken, is to cramp and do violence to our Saviour's language, who calls it indeed blasphemy and speaking against the Holy Ghost, because the ordinary method of casting reproaches is by speaking, yet could not be supposed to mean
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that it might not possibly be done any other way; for we have produced other passages dictated also by his Spirit, that express the thing by other names, and with particular descriptions, that do not admit of so strict limitation. It is true that where the most dreadful penalty is denounced, there, according to the stated measures of divine justice, we are warranted to suppose the fact must be attended by the most aggravating circumstances. So far then we are very ready to acknowledge, that, to become the sin against the Holy Ghost, it must be expressed, if not by words, by something no less declarative of abuse and contempt than words; for words themselves are but signs, and it is possible a man may express himself as plainly, strongly, and fully, and be as perfectly understood, by some significant action, as by any words he could utter: therefore wherever the case happens that he can and does, by actions quite declarative of his meaning, and as little liable to mistake, either cast this particular abuse upon the Holy Ghost, or express his total apostacy from Christianity, and does it with an intent so to be understood, (without which, I apprehend, it attains not its final complement of guilt) in such case the insult must be the same, as if he spoke it. I make no doubt that they who struck out the above, or other like contracted senses of this blasphemy, did it with a charitable view of
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bringing so mighty a guilt within as narrow a compass, and thereby confining it to as few miserable objects, as may be; but it is a dangerous expedient; there must, at least, as much mischief follow from giving it too scanty boundaries, as extending them too wide. We shall better exercise our caution and our charity by a due attention to another property of this sin, which still remains to be considered, and which may very successfully be applied to check any hasty and uncharitable censures on this head.—It is then particularly to be noted, that the irremissible blasphemy is not any way incurred, either by speaking, or otherwise, unless it be wilfully, and against conviction; “If we sin wilfully, saith the Apostle to the Hebrews”, after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful looking for of judgment, and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries;” concerning which words we are to remark——1st, That though the crime be expressed at large, under the general character of *sinning wilfully*, yet having the signature of unpardonableness set upon it, it is in this place most undoubtedly to be understood of the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost, which is emphatically *the sin*, the

* Heb. x. 26, 27.

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greatest and most obnoxious of all sins. And this sense of the passage is likewise confirmed from the whole context, particularly at the 29th verse, more than once already quoted, where the Apostle, still speaking of the same sin, proceeds to a distincter explication of it, describing it under such enormous workings, as amount to nothing less than an utter renunciation of all the principles of Christianity, the treating the gifts and graces of the Holy Ghost as illusions, and representing the mystery of the redemption, and the means of salvation, as mere fable and fiction.

2dly, It must be observed, that *wilfully* here includes not barely the doing it knowingly, and against the sense of our own conscience, but with hatred and malice prepense. If the renunciation of Christianity had absolutely been the sin against the Holy Ghost, without taking in wilfulness and malice, there had been no hopes for the lapsed, no allowances on account of human frailty, and the force of fear and terror. But St. Peter, we know, disclaimed, nay abjured, our Saviour, even against full conviction; and yet, because he did it through human infirmity, being surprised and terrified into it, he both repented and was restored. St. Paul likewise informs us concerning himself, that he was once a bitter enemy of Christ and Christianity, that

1 Tim. i. 13.

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his rage broke out into the most violent overt-acts, and he was even a blasphemer of him and his religion, calling him, no doubt, a deceiver, and his evidences and miracles frauds and impostures; and yet all this was not the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost, but he still obtained mercy, because he did it ignorantly, in unbelief.—On the truth of what we are now advancing is grounded, we apprehend, the reason and propriety of St. Peter's answer to Simon the sorcerer, from whose history, as recorded in the Acts of the Apostles^t, we learn, that he certainly imputed the gifts of the Holy Ghost to diabolical acts. And it was evidently on this presumption of their being convey'd by some superior magick to his own, that he offer'd money to the Apostles, if they would impart the secret, and enable him by the like horrid art to confer the same power upon others: Than which nothing surely could more fully come up to the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost, if we consider the thing abstractedly from the intention; and yet, because he appeared to say this from his own real, though very wicked, sentiments, and did not as yet do it with any premeditated insult, as his submissive reply to the Apostolical rebuke at that time (whatever his behaviour might afterwards be) does clearly

^t Acts viii.

suppose, St. Peter would not absolutely pronounce him at present to be in the irre-missible state. His extreme impiety indeed, and profaneness in entering into the church with such unworthy thoughts, as the hopes of becoming thereby a more expert magician, and the continuing to dishonour his baptism, by a conduct suited to such impiety, justly induced the Apostle to declare him to be in the gall of bitterness, and the bond of iniquity; however, he still refers him to penitence and prayers, if perhaps *the thought of his heart* may be forgiven him; which yet he could never have supposed, if he had been assured his guilt was that of the unpardonable sin.—In like manner, by reasoning from the principles and nature of this sin, we may give a very fair and full solution of a passage in 2 Tim. iv. 14, which has been a stumbling-block to some men not very well disposed to judge candidly of scripture; it is, where St. Paul, whose overflowing charity to men's souls had on another occasion induced him to express himself in such astonishing concern for his mistaken brethren, as to wish himself accursed from Christ for them; where, I say, this very St. Paul so far indulges his resentment, and speaks in so extremely different a spirit, concerning Alexander, who had done him much evil, as to load him with the severest of all imprecations, “The
“ Lord

"Lord reward him according to his deeds." But the case, in the way proposed, may be accounted for very consistently with the Apostolical character. Alexander, as appears from this place, was a most violent opposer of the gospel; "he did me, saith the Apostle, "much evil," i. e. not me in my personal capacity (as some would needs have it), but me in my ministry and office in the work of the gospel; and it is evidently so explained in the following verse, "for he hath greatly withstood our words." There cannot be any reasonable doubt, that this is the Alexander whom the Apostle had mentioned in his first epistle to Timothy, as delivered over by him to Satan for his corrupt unchristian manners, which at length produced in him a shipwreck of faith too (c. i. ver. 19, 20); yet as in a shipwreck, in the literal sense, a man's life may be saved, and possibly somewhat further be recovered from the wreck; so here all was not yet lost; there still remained, if I may so speak, some, though dying, embers of spiritual life, that might possibly be again stirred up and lighted into a flame. To this end he is laid under the Apostolic censure, is delivered to Satan, that his sufferings might check him in his career of wickedness and blasphemies, and prevent his falling into the irrecoverable one. But, as appears from this second epistle, no good fruit followed from this necessary discipline;

cipline; his stubbornness and pride grew but the more intractable for being reprov'd, and we necessarily conclude from the Apostle's manner of expressing himself here, that his malice had on some occasion carried him out into the most extravagant enormities, even the last deadly blasphemy, and a total apostasy. Into this sad estate St. Paul considered him as fallen, and was sufficiently secured against any error of judgment in the case, by the gift of *discerning of spirits*¹; a gift, which as it was necessary for the exigences of the church in it's infant-state, so the apostles were particularly, under extraordinary emergencies, favoured with it. It was by this gift, and on a similar occasion, where the honour of the Holy Spirit was concerned, that St. Peter saw into the heart of Ananias and Sapphira², and laid open the fraud and fallacy of both; and it was by the same gift that our Apostle St. Paul was enabled so strongly to characterize Elymas, as a man full of all subtlety and mischief, a child of the devil, and an enemy of all righteousness, Acts xiii. 10. and again in ch. xiv. 9. to discover in the impotent man, who had been a cripple from the womb, a faith sufficient to make him susceptible of a miraculous cure; and therefore he instantly cured him. So in the case before us, he discerned the

¹ 1 Cor. xii. 10.

² Acts v. 3.

spirit of the man, he saw the guilt of his heart, he knew the sentence God had past upon it, and that this sentence was irreversible; to say therefore of him, under the circumstances above described, "the Lord reward him according to his deeds," breathed no spirit of fierceness and revenge; it was not a prayer for something the event of which was not known, and might or might not come to pass; but, in all equitable construction, an attestation to a fact certain, to somewhat already determin'd, and absolutely unavoidable; and so more an act of faith than any thing else; an expressing His entire belief in what God had declared, a due submission to his absolute decree, and a full assent to the justice of it. — But I return

Some Commentators have chose to remove all difficulties at once from the text, by having recourse to an alteration in it, and instead of ἀποδῶν (the Lord reward) would substitute ἀποδώσει (he will reward). The Alexandrine Ms. and a few others favour the change; yet our own reading, with the advantage of a much greater number of Mss. to support it, may certainly in this instance be allowed to stand on better authority than that which is proposed to take it's place; and it will be allowed that in matters not necessary nor very certain, alterations are, or ought to be, uneligible to us. The exposition that is given above is submitted to the reader; it has at least this advantage, that, taking the word as we find it, and in it's own genuine force and import, without any violence or straining of sense or grammar, it answers every end that could be proposed by altering the text, and without any change at all.

from this digression, which, though long, yet I hope may plead it's own excuse, as hereby a very remarkable passage in scripture not only itself receives great light from our subject, but again reflects it by illustrating and confirming the subject from which it received it; so that we may here apply that just and fine sentiment of Ennius, with the change only of a single word to suit it to the occasion:

— *Qui alteri comiter monstrat viam,
Quasi de suo lumine lumen accendat, facit:
Nihilominus ut ipsi luceat, quòd illi accenderit.*

Ennii Fragment. p. 297. Amstel. 1707.

There remains another text, which must by no means be passed over, as it falls within the compass of our original design of reviewing and examining all the texts, that specially relate to our subject, and which I have already engaged, on occasion of its being sometimes applied to a very different meaning, to give a fuller account of. It is in the vth ch. of St. John's 1st Epist. ver. 16. where he speaks of a sin unto death; and to set forth to the church the desperate and unpardonable nature of it, in the very place where he is recommending the weaker brethren, whose infirmity shall have betrayed them into sin, to the charity and prayers of such as are perfecter and stronger, he puts in his exception with regard to this sin, and lets them know, he can give no encouragement

ment, to pray for it; "If any man see his brother sin a sin which is not unto death, he shall ask, and he shall give him life," (i. e. God will hear him, and so his prayers shall contribute to raise him up, and renew him again to repentance); but he subjoins, "there is a sin unto death, I do not say, that he shall pray for it." If the denomination of a sin unto death should be thought not so distinctly to note the criterion of this blasphemy, as is done in the other passages before produced, yet at least itself carries a stamp upon it, that bears a most alarming resemblance to it; and when we take in the context, and lay the whole together, I cannot look upon it as any thing less than one and the same: For is there any sense which so naturally results from these words, and so readily offers itself to the mind here, as that of some singular sin superlatively great above all others? We have learnt from our Saviour himself, that there is one such particular sin; nay he assures us, that all other sins might be forgiven, but this one should never be forgiven unto men. Could any thing more exactly and truly suit the Apostle's distinction betwixt a sin not unto death, and a sin unto death? It is true, all sin is in its own nature deadly; but, upon the scheme and through the powers of the redemption, all is not irrecoverable; nor indeed is any so, but what the Redeemer himself has put in

his exception against, and declared the divine mercy will not be extended to it; and such I take the sin unto death to be. God has actually precluded his mercy from it; and when a man has once forced his way through this fatal pass, he has taken his leave of the means of salvation, and nothing can be effectual to bring him back again. — But might not the Apostle intend only a temporal death here? what has been urged is the strongest presumption to the contrary; nor is it easy to say upon what good reason, if he meant nothing more than *that*, he could mark out the guilt, which was the cause of it, to be such as would not admit even the prayers of a Christian for it. But if we take the account above, and suppose the thing meant to be a spiritual death, all is clear at once; the case was absolutely desperate, and no prayer could possibly be successful.

It has been acknowledged however, and it was but just to do it, that interpreters and divines have often explained this passage to quite another sense. A particular inquiry into this matter would lead to debates too involved and intricate for the generality of readers, who find little either improvement or pleasure from such discussions. What has been already offered is certainly the plainest and clearest, and possibly (for I am not singular in supposing the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost to be the thing intended here)

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the juſteſt and trueſt ſenſe; but this muſt be ſubmitted to the learned reader, who, if he chooſes it, will eaſily have recourſe to the commentators at large; and if upon examination he is preſuaded that St. John had not his eye here upon any ſingle ſupereminent ſin, but on all the greater kinds of ſin whatever; if he approves of the liberty in taking for granted, that by a brother in this place is to be underſtood a ſick brother, and that therefore muſt be meant the miraculous raiſing him up from a ſtate of ſickneſs to health; if he is ſatisfied that the intent of this paſſage is to direct the exertion of this power, and to limit it to offenders in leſs notorious inſtances, called ſins not unto death; and on the other hand, that no prayer, i. e. no miraculous cure to be performed by prayer, ſhould be attempted on any perſon guilty of any of the more atrocious crimes, as murder, adultery, inceſt, or the like, and which are denominated ſins unto death, being ſuch as God in the law had expreſſly directed the offender ſhould be put to death for; if, I ſay, he can get over all the difficulties of ſo precarious a comment, or thinks them no difficulties at all, he ſees reaſons which I am not aware of, and will prefer an interpretation ſuited to his own ſentiment: whatever that be, I ſhall have a claim to the return of juſt candour from himſelf, in acknowledging, that no one article or
branch

branch in our account of the irremissible sin stands upon any interpretation of this particular text; which indeed, in the sense we have given of it, both illustrates, and, as a collateral evidence, confirms it too in some respects (for which reason I have endeavour'd to assert to it what I believed to be its just sense and rank); but after all adds nothing new to it; our whole scheme and description thereof being before established on other texts, the meaning of which is explicit, and determinate beyond evasion; and from these I shall draw out what I presume to be a clear and full definition of this blasphemy, and with that conclude this chapter.

The blasphemy against the Holy Ghost is either, particularly, a declared imputation of the miracles and gifts of the Holy Ghost to Satan, or Satanick arts, that is, to magick or imposture; or it is, in a more general view, such a total and open apostasy from Christianity, as necessarily includes the other; and in either case, wilfully and with malice prepense, against the sense of conscience, and the conviction of the man's own mind to the contrary.

CHAP.

CHAP. II.

IT has been matter of enquiry, whether the Pharisees, who charged our Saviour with casting out devils by Beelzebub, did thereby become guilty of the sin against the Holy Ghost. Learned men have been divided on this head; some affirming that they did, and others pronouncing that the sin against the Holy Ghost could not at that time be committed at all. The question is not a point of curiosity only: it is connected with the main subject; and a mistake in it must either flow from, or may possibly sometime lead men into a false judgment of the sin itself. Let us see whether the account we have given of it, in the preceding chapter, directs to such an answer as is consistent with reason, charity, and the holy Scriptures.— To form a just and candid judgment in the case, it is in the first place necessary, that we consider under what circumstances these blasphemers acted; what evidence they sinned against; and upon what contrary plea or arguments they might be emboldened to utter so high a contumely; for it is not at all credible, that they should have nothing to plead,

plead, no shew of reasoning in a case of so great concern. The unbelieving Jews did not want their arguments any more than the modern Infidels among ourselves; and though the perverseness and obstinacy of the former has often afforded an handle for much insult and triumph to some men, as beyond the example of any other nation, and not only utterly unsuitable to, and incredible of, a chosen people of God, but derogating from the authority of the revelation itself; yet even in this most remarkable of all their contumacies, there is no more in it, than what is readily accounted for from the natural unrestrained workings of a bad man's heart. If the Jews that lived in the times of our Saviour argued in the same manner as their posterity have done since, we need not be at a loss to judge by what kind of reasoning they proceeded. The learned Wagenfeil, in his *Tela ignea Satanae*, has published the famous apology for Judaism against Christianity, written, he thinks, about the 12th century, and bearing the proud title of *Niz-zachon* or *Victory*: In this, the case of a false prophet, and of signs and wonders performed by him, as we find it put in Deut. xiii. the first and following verses, is applied to Jesus; and from it the Jew argues, that by making himself God, he was a preacher of strange gods, and drew the people aside from the worship of the only true God; so that

that himself must be an impostor, and his miracles illusive, or diabolical; “non tantum (I give here Wagenfeil’s translation) dixit se prophetam esse, sed insuper fecit seipsum Deum, & seduxit fratres suos; ideo de eo dicit Moses, Ne acquiescito illi, neque auscultato illi, sed omnino illum occidito—caput & summa rei in istis consistit quia tentat Dominus Deus vester vos.” —“Quod si de eo, qui Deos alienos colere jubet, Moses pronunciavit, Moriatur propheta ille, quanto magis de eo valet, qui seipsum Deum facit?”

It is no hard supposition, that the Pharisees of our Saviour’s time might give the same perverse turn to the same text: it is not improbable in so important a case as this, that the very objection, as it stands in *Nizzachon*, might be not only started by those their forefathers, but handed down to their sons: it is certain that prejudice, ambition, worldly interest, would impel those their forefathers to catch at every twig; and this was no contemptible one, tho’ there was really at the bottom,

* Vid. *Tela ignea*, vol. ii. p. 50, 51. — The whole passage in Deut. xiii. here referred to runs thus:

Verse 1. If there arise among you a prophet, or a dreamer of dreams, and giveth thee a sign or a wonder—
v. 2. and the sign or the wonder come to pass, whereof he spake unto thee, saying, Let us go after other gods (which thou hast not known) and let us serve them, ver. 3. Thou shalt not hearken to the words of that prophet, or that dreamer of dreams; for the Lord your God proveth you, to know whether you love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul.—ver. 5. And that prophet, or that dreamer of dreams, shall be put to death,
nothing

nothing similar in the two cases. The view of the text in Deut. xiii. is confined to idolatry, and seducing the people from Jehovah to the worship of false Gods, by some strange signs and wonders, performed in a manner unknown to them. But Jesus was so far from drawing them off the worship of the Lord their God, that it was his constant labour and endeavour, to assert, explain, and enforce what Moses taught on their duty to God, and love of man^a; and to remove the corruptions and superstitions with which human folly or naughtiness had debased his doctrine. And then as to the signs and wonders mentioned in the same passage, his miracles were not only what no impostor ever did or could do, but such as God had never empowered any man, not even their own Moses, to do before him. But did not Jesus assume to be God? and did not this acquit the Jews in what they said and did, upon the rule of the text before us? We answer that Christ had no where yet called himself God, had no where claimed Divine worship. This, and his proper Divinity, were matters reserved for the maturer age of his church, to which *Milk only, and not strong meats*, were at present suited; and therefore, tho' he was God, it was absolute injustice in them at that time to say he made himself God, or equal to God; for he had not yet so far

^a See Mark xii. from ver. 29, to ver. 34, inclusive.

revealed his nature, that they could construe it to his strict divinity, altho' envy, and their heat of rage and dispute, drove them on to lay such a charge, in order to destroy him. He did indeed explicitly declare himself to be the son of God, and this was made a mighty handle against him, as setting himself up for a God. "For a good work, say the Jews, we stone thee not, but for blasphemy; and because that thou, being a man, makest thyself God." John x. 33. To which our Saviour replies, ver. 36. "Say ye of him whom the Father hath sanctified and sent into the world, Thou blasphemest, because I said, I am the Son of God?" To call himself the Son of God, was, it is true, declaring himself to be the Messiah, which was no more than what themselves knew, or might have known, from their own scriptures. Grotius with great reason concludes from some passages there and in the gospels^b, that it was a name commonly given to the Messiah; Thus Nathanael, upon being convinced that Jesus was *He*, declared his faith in these words^c, "Thou art the Son of God, thou art the king of Israel." And the high-priest laid his adjuration upon him in like terms, "Tell us whether thou be *the Christ the Son of God*^d;" in both which passages, it is taken for granted as a well known truth, that the

^b See note on Matt. xiv. 33.

^c John i. 49, 50.

^d Matt. xxvi. 63.

48. *Of the BLASPHEMY against*

Messiah or Christ must be in some peculiar and eminent sense the Son of God; and this conclusion is supposed to have been drawn from the authority of the 2d Psalm, ver. 7. "Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee;" which Psalm, it is a point acknowledged, their doctors interpreted of the Messiah; and the epistle to the Hebrews, ch. i. ver. 5. bears witness they were not here mistaken in their interpretation. Thus the capital argument of the Jews for their infidelity comes in full evidence of that for which it has been produced and explained, viz. that they were not without all pretence or plea, tho' they had none sufficient to exculpate them.—The question in hand therefore must turn upon this; if the abuse was owing, in any considerable degree, to their being entangled in prejudices about the sense of their prophets, or the imagined sacredness of their traditions; if in the blindness and heat of their zeal they would suppose, as many of them did suppose, that to draw men off from the observance of those traditions, was the same as to seduce them from their obedience to God; if, under such a notion, they broke out into this their highest abuse, as it has been supposed they might, upon a stretch and misapplication of the passage in Deuteronomy, which we have been reviewing: these must be admitted, as

* Vide Grotium in loc. citat. & Pocockii Miscell.

far as the men were sincere in them, to have been, tho' not justifications, yet abatements of their guilt. Stubbornness, or avarice, or pride, or possibly some other odious quality, might here be justly charged upon them; which rendered the insult highly criminal; but they did not yet sin against conviction: great as the evidence was, they had neglected duly to weigh and consider it; they did what they did in unbelief; there was yet time to give the cause a re-hearing and better attention; they might still be convinced, and, being so, might repent, and their sin therefore was not unpardonable.—In this light we may be permitted to view the conduct of St. Paul before his conversion; and in the same light we may properly look upon many other warm, but honest and sincere zealots amongst the Jews, to whom God's mercy was not unwilling to make great allowances for the first workings of their prejudices, till their natural fire had time to cool; and reason and reflexion made room for the divine grace to enter, and light up a purer flame within them. But, on the other hand, if there were any such amongst them, and we have too great reason to fear that there were some such, who, using religion only for a cloak, were the forwardest and loudest in the cry against Christ; who, provoked to have their hypocrisy unmasked, and their great Diana, and spiritual trade and traffick, brought into danger by him,

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were

were resolved to make a bold attempt to ruin *him* first; and though they saw the hand of God in his works, and what they must be conscious could not be the effect of diabolical assistance, yet, partly to gratify their hatred and malice, and partly to secure their authority and interest with the people, knowingly and falsely affirmed him to be a minister of hell; of such men there is no hope; their conduct takes in the whole of this mighty sin; not only the matter, but the spirit of it too; and is, what nothing but the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost is, the most wicked of all sins, committed under the most aggravating of all circumstances.

But let us dismiss the case of the Pharisees, and come to what we are incomparably more concerned in, which is, whether at this time it is possible for ourselves to incur so great a guilt. For admitting the thing to have been possible at some times, and under some circumstances, must it therefore of course come home to our own case? Is there no difference betwixt us, who receive the miracles by testimony only, and those profligates, who vented their blasphemies against the evidence of their senses, and who saw the dead raised to life before them? The argument at first view looks fair and promising, and has occasioned a notion, that, since the extraordinary gifts of the Holy Spirit are ceased, and his miracles no longer wrought amongst us, they cannot therefore

therefore be blasphemed by us. But is it then no longer possible to abuse and vilify any institution or government than whilst it is settling? or would it be less criminal to do this, after it has been approved, settled, and received? May there not be men in the world, who will still ascribe the gifts of the Holy Ghost, recorded in scripture, to fraud, or the operation of devils? and would it not be the same injustice to Christianity, the same dishonour and abuse of that blessed Spirit, to do it now, as it was in the times of the apostles? It is certain, the holy scripture no where gives us the least handle for limiting this sin to the first age of Christianity, but speaks of it in the same manner, as of other sins there prohibited, and in such terms as equally extend to present and to future times. Were there indeed any thing in the nature of the crime, to confine it to that period, we should be under a necessity of interpreting those texts with proper limitations; but that the case is really otherwise, we have, I think, evidence incontestable from what was proved in the first chapter, concerning the nature of this sin; the guilt of which was there shewn to arise mainly from its being done against knowledge and conviction, whether that conviction might proceed from sensible or only moral evidence. Of whatever kind therefore the present evidences of Christianity are (whether arising from sense, or from testimony, it matters not with regard

to the point in debate) ; yet being such as are quite sufficient to produce a firm and full conviction in the understanding ; the imputing the miracles of the Holy Ghost to imposture or magical arts, when the understanding is so convinced, must bring us under the same guilt, and the same punishment, as it might do those who actually saw the miracles of the gospel performed before them. Nay there are circumstances, which argue this blasphemy more criminal at this time, than it could be in the Jews, when our Saviour denounced the sentence upon it ; in every other respect than as eye-witnesses, they lay under greater disadvantage ; their carnal interests were more deeply engaged on the wrong side than our own ; ourselves have no prejudices of Judaism or Heathenism to struggle with ; Christianity was then but new-forming ; it has now stood the test of near two thousand years ; the miracles which these Jews beheld, have since that time been scrutinized and tried by all the efforts of human wit and learning, and yet we see them stand like the house founded on a rock ; the reasonableness, the wisdom, the mercy of this scheme of our redemption, has been discussed over and over, and has come out of all its fiery trials with fuller and brighter lustre. To all which I must add one thing more, which, if examined and understood, is alone equal to the advantage the Jews had as eye-witnesses to the miracles ; it is indeed it-
self

self a most illustrious and standing miracle, and which cannot deceive us; I mean, the accomplishment of a series of prophecies, from the preaching of the gospel to our own times; for the knowledge of futurity being the prerogative of God, therefore prophecies undoubtedly proved, and certainly fulfilled, cannot be less than one kind of sure miracles; and such are the prophecies of Jesus and his apostles. That they were actually delivered before the events, no man in his senses will deny; that the events were such as no human prudence or sagacity could possibly foresee, no art could counterfeit, the nature of those events irrefragably demonstrates; and that they were actually verified by the accomplishment of the facts, all history, and as far as our times extend, our own experience and the testimony of our senses confirm. The breaking of the Roman empire into the several kingdoms that succeeded it, and the erection of the Papal power, are the two greatest events in the whole frame of civil and ecclesiastical government, that have happened in the world since the first establishment of Christianity. And yet both were foretold with amazing particularity; the latter of them was of so peculiar a nature that no pretension was ever formed, nothing *aut simile aut secundum*, ever produced by the wit or the power of man, in any degree equal to it. Mr. Bayle, who knew

54 *Of the BLASPHEMY against*

the world well, and had studied its policies and the revolutions of Governments, has remarked, that the power which the popes attained to, is one of the greatest prodigies in history^f; and he never made a juster remark. It was a power erected under the pretence of that religion, which did above all things condemn it; was maintained by that secular arm, which it trampled upon and abused; and carried its head over the kings of the earth, not for a short space only, but through a succession of many centuries. A thing so distant from all appearances, so contrary to all probability, which no man could be imagined so hardy as to attempt, and much less so fortunate as to succeed in, no human artifice and cunning would ever have ventured to foretel; yet the spirit of prophecy has not only foretold, but described it, its several periods, the rise, the progress, every eminent corruption that distinguished it, and the gradual declension and fall of it. The former have all had their complement; ourselves see its great declension towards its fall, but the full period which God has fixed for that is not yet accomplished, and so the end is not yet; but from what is past, we may rest assured as to what is to

^fVide sub art. GREGORY VII. in the remarks under letter S. and what had been said by him before under letter B.

come,

come, that not one jot or tittle of what is promised shall pass away, till all be fulfilled.

I cannot leave this astonishing prophecy without remarking that, at the time of the prediction, the causes out of which this strange phenomenon arose, had as yet no existence; the Roman empire was yet unbroke, no apparent danger from northern irruptions, no symptom to indicate such mighty events as the planting and raising such a number of kingdoms by foreigners, with whose assistance, and over whom too, the fabrick of the papal spiritual tyranny was to be erected; add to this, scarce a country, in the time of such tumults, exerting themselves, and with proper courage and magnanimity catching the occasion of vindicating their own liberty, but sinking under new lords, and driven themselves out of their possessions in Gaul, in Spain, in Africa, in Pannonia, in Britain, in Italy, on all which mighty events the completion of the prophecy depended; arts and learning buried in the ruins and waste of wars,

If the reader desires to see other instances of prophecies fulfilled, he may receive ample satisfaction in Dr. Newton's (now bishop of Bristol's) excellent work on the Prophecies; where he will find a learned and arduous subject rendered easy and entertaining to him, and one of the noblest evidences of our religion, ably and largely maintained; and be furnished with such incontestable facts in defence of it, as none of our adversaries will be able to refute.

and ignorance and superstition seizing their place; out of the ten kingdoms to be erected, three were to fall into the papal hands, and the rest to give their power into the same hands, to wit, that power by the means of which the popes established their spiritual usurpations. No prophecy was ever more punctually delivered, none could have a more exact accomplishment.

But to return: May not, after all, such a sin as has been described in the foregoing chapter, be deemed greater than human nature may be supposed to admit of? Can we conceive a man so far sunk beneath all truth and goodness, and the moral sense which seems natural to us, that (after being convinced in his own conscience in respect to the extraordinary effects which are in scripture ascribed to the Holy Ghost, that they must really be the work of God, and that Christianity, in support of which they were performed, must consequently be true) he should, notwithstanding, set himself to oppose the gospel, and openly vilify the miracles which confirmed it? We acknowledge indeed such a conduct goes those lengths of folly as well as impiety, that every candid man, were he to judge by his own heart, must think incredible; it transforms a man into the express image of the fallen angels, who, in their exalted station, under the largest share of the divine goodness, and the fullest knowledge of

of their obligations to duty and gratitude, yet broke out into a most unnatural rebellion against God. This instance, whilst it shews the extreme malignity, proves the possibility of the thing; and that intelligent beings may work themselves up to so great an height of folly and wickedness, as at the same time to believe and to blaspheme. Which will be further confirmed by considering that, however irrational the conduct may be, yet nothing is more frequent with many men, than to suffer present pleasure or interest, though small in themselves, to be much more regarded by them, than a confessedly nobler and greater good which lies at a distance. Now men's secular interests may sometimes be best answered by such extravagancies of impiety; the authors of them may propose to flatter wicked men hereby, who having little to hope, and much to fear from religion, will not, they may think, be displeased to hear its evidences set at nought; and if such wicked men be great men too, this may encourage them to expect favour and advancement from them, on account of a doctrine so suited to their wishes; or when this is not the case, they may still be flattering and deceiving themselves this way, with hopes of shaking off the fetters of conscience, and those checks which give them so much uneasiness in the irregular pursuit of their pleasures. Nor let it be imagined that this

this is supposition only; for there are men in the world, who, either by inventing arguments against religion, or reading only prophane books, where they find them invented ready to their hands, industriously avoiding at the same time the solid refutations of them, which they might have easily seen in the writings of wiser and better men, take no small pains to make themselves infidels, and at length in a manner force themselves to be so. And their power to do this is the less to be wondered at, as the will has but too much influence over the understanding, and ever the most where the heart is least guarded with true fortitude and integrity; for although our understanding be not absolutely in our command, nor is it entirely in our power to believe or disbelieve whatever we please, yet we may, by a voluntary and wilful neglect of, and inattention to, the force of what we do not like, in a great degree stifle the evidence of things which we were sufficiently aware, and even persuaded of; and it is this laboured blindfolding of ourselves, and, as I may call it, violence done to our own understanding, that we must assign more or less wilfulness to, as the case is; for there is not any baseness, not even this blasphemy itself, but may admit some false appearances to amuse the author with, though mere delusions of his own creating. By these means we may first bring ourselves to a
contempt,

depravity. There is a tendency in us to be so self-sufficient, that it is possible for ourselves to fall into this sin. It will be a further check coming to our attention, to know and understand the mighty consequences that follow on it. There may have been incidentally touched upon before; but a full and distinct expunx is here due to the importance of them. And the full and constant effort which

CHAPTER

CHAP. III.

IT is a salutary warning to us to have been assured that it is possible for ourselves to fall into this sin. It will be a further quickening to our caution, to know and understand the mighty consequences that follow upon it. These may have been incidentally touched upon before; but a full and distinct enquiry is here due to the importance of them^b. And the first and constant effect which

^b Before I enter upon this, the reader is requested particularly to recollect what has been said on the nature of this sin, and the qualities essential to the constitution of it, from whence he will see, that what follows can neither be intended, nor ought to be applied, save only to wilful and malicious blasphemy, against the sense of conscience, and from *an impious design* to cast the dishonour of falsehood and forgery on Christianity, and that Holy Spirit, by whom it was first established, and its mighty blessings are still conveyed. As to *philosophical error*, by which name it is sometimes called, when a serious and inquisitive man, either thro' extravagant doubt and diffidence, or led on to nice or high speculations, which sober and just reason would teach him not to meddle with, finds himself involved in questions and difficulties, which he has not skill or capacity to resolve, till at length perhaps his own, or the subtle and sophistical reasonings of others, draw him

which this their blasphemy produces, is, that it absolutely rivets and settles that evil disposition and malignity of heart under which it was committed. The man has sold himself to do wickedness, and God leaves him to his own miserable bargain; it is therefore immediately followed with an utter dereliction of the divine Grace; the Holy Spirit is not only grieved, but departed from him; the lamp of spiritual life is no longer weak, but quite expired and extinct within him; a seared conscience and a final impenitence take place; and the necessary consequent, or rather concomitant, is a state of absolute irremissibility. He, by whom we are saved, and without whom no man can be saved, even the Merciful Redeemer, has, for an alarming monitory to us, left the irrevocable sentence upon it, "It shall never be forgiven, neither in this world, neither in the world to come."—Forgiveness of any sin is the remitting the punishment due to it; never to be forgiven therefore in this world, or the world to come, is never to be exempted from the punishment of it, either in this world, or in the world to come.—Now the punish-

him on to doubt or deny the faith; of such persons, and so far as there is not a concurrence of a malicious and perverse will, we speak not here. We know the Judge of all the earth will do right, and not suffer the punishment of their excesses to outweigh the degree of guilt incurred by them. In his merciful hands therefore we leave them, and return to those whose iniquity has filled up the measure of this sin.

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ment of sin in this world, is either some temporal calamity inflicted on the sinner by God, or the subtraction of the divine grace, in a degree proportioned to the nature and circumstances of the sin, or both. With respect therefore to this world, our Saviour here affirms, that whoever is guilty of this sin, may probably find the hand of God heavy upon him, and a blast and a curse crossing him in his undertakings, or embittering his enjoyments in life.—And yet because, according to the methods of Providence in the government of the world, a man may be under God's severest displeasure, and yet be permitted to enjoy many temporal felicities that good men often want; it is not necessary even here that vengeance must always be speedily executed in this sense; but then as to the other, namely, the withdrawing the divine grace, the punishment is certain, immediate, and invariable; for since, so long as that grace is not withdrawn, there is a possibility of repentance, and so a possibility of pardon, since the scriptures have peremptorily declared this sin shall never be pardoned, there must of course follow upon it such an absolute disqualification for the divine grace, and consequently so total a subtraction of it, as shall entirely leave the man to the hardness of his own heart, in which state he cannot be renewed again to repentance. It is clear therefore how such a sinner has no forgiveness in this life; and scripture gives as little
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room to expect it in another. It is irremissible in this world, because there is no place for the man's repentance and change here; and if repentance and a change could take place in another world, it would not be irremissible there, which would contradict our Saviour's express declaration.

And yet we would not be understood as taking upon us to affirm any absolute incapacity in God to raise up such sinners, but only a full certainty that he will not do it; and that, according to the settled methods of grace, and the scheme of redemption, he that falls into this sin is as much lost, as if it were actually out of the power of God to restore him; so that there is not the least ground to charge us with setting limits to the divine mercy; for we set no other than what God himself has fixed, and the fear of doing this is a dangerous and ill-judged caution in some men, who from such apprehension have recourse to a qualified sense, and, notwithstanding all the fullness and strength of expression made use of by Christ to secure his meaning, have taken pains to explain it away, and lower it down to a bare difficulty of remission, or an impossibility of obtaining it without a deep and severe repentance. But with such a latitude of expounding, what can we be sure of? Had our Saviour ever so much intended a strict unlimited declaration, could it have been delivered in more direct or stronger

stronger terms than those he has used here? The words seem not only purposely chosen as the most explicit possible, and the properest that could be to express an absolute irremissibility, but to have been peculiarly directed to prevent misconstruction. Every time the

Whether any false notions concerning repentance in another world, and pardon to be obtained there, prevailed amongst the Jews; which our Saviour might intend to obviate, is not certain. Grotius thinks they had some such notion: "Videtur Christus de industria utrumque sæculum nominasse, ut Judæis auferret eam quæ sibi blandiebantur adversus gravissima delicta persuasionem; existimabant enim &c."—et infra, "Antiquiorem esse Christi temporibus persuasionem de peccatis quibusdam post mortem remittendis apertissimum est ex Jasone Cyrenæo, qui oblata narrat sacrificia *ὡς ἀπαλίας τῶν ὑπογνησίων.*"

Vide in Matt. xii. 32. This were much to the purpose, did not his evidence fail him; but the feeble authority of the second book of Maccabees (where the story referred to is related, ch. xii. 40, &c.) cannot be admitted sufficient to ground so extraordinary an opinion upon in those early times, which it professes to give an account of. Lightfoot, whose talents lay eminently in Jewish learning, denies any such notion amongst them; but he charges another upon them, which he thinks our Saviour might have in view here. "Non remittetur in hoc seculo, neque in futuro; i. e. neque ante mortem, neque, quod vos somniatis, *per* mortem." vid. Horæ in Mat. xii. 31. According to which notion it was the *articulus mortis*, the mere suffering death, that expiated. But the authorities produced are Talmudical, and so these too none of the best, either in time or intrinsic weight. It may not be unacceptable to some readers to be cautioned of an error in the Synopsis Crit. on Matt. xii. 32: where in giving Lightfoot's opinion, *post mortem* is read instead of *per mortem*, and thereby his interpretation is made to fall in with that of Grotius, tho' very different from it.

Gospels mention the occasion to happen, our Saviour's sentence is repeated, and tho' varying somewhat in terms, yet the sense is the same in all, full and absolute; in St. Luke, that "the sin shall not be forgiven;" in St. Matthew, that "it shall never be forgiven to men;" and is there enforced by adding, that "it shall not be forgiven, neither in this world, neither in the world to come;" and in St. Mark, the different manner in which Christ expresses himself, is but a further confirmation of the thing, the words being no less exclusive of all pardon; he that blasphemeth against the Holy Ghost hath never forgiveness, but is, not only as we translate it, "in danger of eternal damnation," but as the words of the original, in their just and true import, express it, *ὁτις ἐστὶν ὀφειλόμενος*^k, is a debtor, and stands bound to suffer everlasting damnation. And what still adds a very considerable strength to all this, is the opposition wherein this sin is set, both by St. Matthew and St. Mark, to all other sins; that whereas they may be forgiven, blasphemy against the Holy Ghost never will; so that, by supposing this sin may be truly repented of and forgiven, we entirely overthrow the distinction made by Christ, and set this blasphemy upon a level with other sins, where himself has so particularly and emphatically distinguished it from them. It

^k See H. Stephens, under the word *ὁτις ἐστὶν ὀφειλόμενος*.

is the clearness and certainty of this distinction that the church of Rome, ever attentive and studious to support its corruptions, and some protestants too, who have peculiarities of their own to defend by it, have made an handle of; and from the singular stress laid upon one sin not being forgiven in another world, have formed an argument that some others may; for if no sin at all could be there forgiven, it must, they think, be needless and absurd to tell us, that the greatest of all sins cannot. The conclusion carried no farther would avail them little, for no one denies that many sins will be there forgiven, but they extend it to a power of making reparation in another life for sins done in this; and the scene for effecting this great work, is fixed to the intermediate state betwixt death and the last judgment; a doctrine, than which nothing can be more injurious to our Saviour's declaration; for tho' it be there implied, that all manner of sins, one only excepted, may be forgiven in the world to come, yet we are not told in it, nor can we deduce from any thing that is there said, how this forgiveness may be obtained; this we are left to learn from other parts of scripture. Now the unpardonable sin having its irremissibility there rested upon *the impossibility of renewing the man that is guilty of it to repentance*, Heb. x. 4, 5. we assuredly conclude, that the reason why other sins may be pardoned is this, that they may

may be repented of. The point therefore upon which the question turns, is solely as to the season or time of that repentance on which they may be forgiven; and the mischief and fallacy of the conclusion censured above, lies in this, it is taken for granted that saving repentance is not limited to this life, but may be performed in another. I have been led into this argument, in order to obviate a most pernicious doctrine, which, amongst other its pretensions, claims support from the principal texts, without the knowledge and just sense of which, our subject cannot be understood; and the natural tendency of that doctrine to slacken men's care and vigilance in their spiritual warfare, by false hopes and dependencies, will excuse some deviation, if it be such, to shew that this notion is as inconsistent with other scriptures, as it is unsupported by those which we have already produced. Some considerable texts will fall in our way to be accounted for; and our own subject will receive light and confirmation from the whole.

It is observable in the case before us, that the texts in the Old Testament descriptive of the state immediately successive to the present (and there are many such) are so far from encouraging any hopes in us of being able to effect a moral change in ourselves there, that they expressly preclude them, and in so strong a manner, that some persons, both in ancient and later times, have been induced to consider

the intermediate state, as one dead scene of inaction and insensibility. This is going great lengths, and it were vain to enquire whether repentance might take place where there is no reason or knowledge at all; but the passages may, I presume, be accounted for, without recurring to such extremities. The peculiar circumstances of the persons that spoke them, will afford us the clue to do it, and at the same time not only resolve the difficulties, which have sometimes occasioned no little perplexity, from the appearance they carry of such a total inaction, but account also for so passionate a fondness which we see expressed in some of them, for a continuance in this world, as seems unworthy of a wise and good man. The texts of this kind, which are of much the greatest moment, were the words either of David or Hezekiah, both of whom planned and executed, at least in a good measure, the noblest schemes for improving and settling divine worship, and the government and security of the state; both of them believed themselves appointed by God to effect the great work, and both had set their hearts extremely upon it; but, in the course of it, were each of them attacked by some violent sickness or malady, that threatened to put an end at once to them and their designs. Hezekiah in particular saw his kingdom in danger from invasions, himself without an heir, and fresh troubles arising to religion and the state

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if he should die at such a juncture¹; and both he, and David before him, were well aware, that under so peculiar a dispensation as that of the Jews, their immature death would hurt the cause of piety, afford matter of triumph to wicked men, and shock the faith of the good. Under this melancholy prospect, and their zeal at the same time for the glory of God and the felicity of their people, how natural was it to address themselves to him in some such humble expostulations as these? “O Lord, I am oppressed, undertake for me^m: What profit is there in my blood when I go down into the pitⁿ?” Can my destruction answer the great purposes thou hast assigned me for? “Shall the dust praise thee? Shall it declare thy truth^o?” Can I, or any one, when removed out of this world, any longer pursue the work we have begun for thy honour? can we profit thy church, or teach thy praises in it? Alas! “The grave, the dead, cannot praise thee^p,” cannot execute the noble and pious designs, which might shew forth thy praise; “They that go down to the pit cannot

¹ The sickness of Hezekiah is acknowledged by the ablest Chronologers and expositors to have happened in the intermediate space of terror and confusion that passed betwixt Sennacherib's entering Judæa, and the miraculous destruction of his army. Vide Prideaux's Connect. p. 1. book 1. sub. an. 714. and Lowth's Comm. in loc. &c.

^m Isa. xxxviii. 14.

ⁿ Ps. xxx. 9.

^o Ibid.

^p Is. xxxviii. 18.

hope for thy truth^a;” all their hopes of seeing the accomplishment of the promises thou hast made of blessing, protection, and deliverance to thy church, cease with them. The interpretation above given arises easily and naturally from the words; and nothing could be more just and suitable to the occasion, than the sentiments here expressed. The two following conclusions result therefrom; first, that all arguments drawn from these passages in favour of an intermediate state of inaction and insensibility are foreign to the purpose; the passages determine nothing one way or other, as to the notion which they are called in to support; for the powers of the soul, and its employment in the separate state, further than what relates to its being able, or not, to do in *that* state, the business which it had left undone in *this*, belong to a very different question, and come not into consideration here.— The other thing I would observe is, that tho’ the account of these texts, above given, rises from the nature of the case, and so is the first and leading sense; yet this does not exclude all secondary and subordinate aim, that may give a wider extent to them, and especially if supported by the known belief and sentiments of their authors. Now David frequently acknowledges his sinfulness, and that the divine

^a Isa. xxxviii. 18.

mercy only could save him: "Enter not into judgment with thy servant, for in thy sight shall no man living be justified." Ps. cxliii. 2. and Hezekiah, after his recovery, imputes that blessing to the forgiveness of God, who had cast his sins behind his back! They might well therefore, in their distress, look on death with awe and humble fear, as creatures accountable to God; and they may reasonably be supposed to have desired and prayed for life, with a view to serve God more perfectly in the remainder of it, and to work out their salvation more assuredly before they finished their course; to their doing of which, they might justly conclude, the faithful execution of the great works they designed, would not a little contribute. Such a prayer arising from such a motive, is not unworthy David or Hezekiah; and the passages well admit the sense and force of that motive; for taken in this light they imply, that our salvation must be wrought out (if wrought out at all) before we die. Sheol and Hades, or the state of the dead, they tell us, cannot praise God. Here praising God, which is but a part, tho' a principal one, of that religion and service which we now perform, as the condition of salvation, and the necessary means of obtaining it, has a more extensive signification, and by a common figure represents or stands for

Isa. xxxviii. 17.

the whole; and thus the sense will be, that in the next state, we can no longer perform the conditions, or apply the means by which we can be saved; so that it is very far from being affirmed that pious souls do not, or cannot praise God at all there; the aim and design being to declare only that the time for working out our salvation by praise, or any other religious service, will then be over; and whereas in the present life we are enjoined to go through a course of duties on which our future felicity depends, and where, in case of any failure, repentance is prescribed, and reformation is to succeed that repentance; with death all this process ceases: to the good their welfare is accomplished; the nature of their duty is changed; it is no longer a task, or trial attended with difficulty, and weariness, and persecutions, and doubts, and danger of miscarrying; it is become their reward, and joy and bliss flow constantly and immediately from it. To the wicked too their warfare is concluded; it ended in shame and defeat; the course of duties for gaining the high prize of salvation is over, and all the means of repairing breaches are ended with it. To this the

* It may add weight to the sense here given, that a principal word in these, and some other passages to the same purpose, is the *hiphil* of *לָבַח*, which, tho' translated in our version by *praise*, yet signifies also *confessing of sins*; "*nunc confiteri peccata, nunc laudem dicere*," as it is expressed

the New Testament perfectly accords; hence that salutary warning given by Christ to the careless slumbering Jews of his time, stirring them up to penitence and amendment from this consideration, that when once the door is shut, it will be too late to knock, Luke xiii. 25. and following verses, where the purport of the whole, is to make us duly sensible, that the present world is our only stage of action; that the means of grace will be no longer continued to sinners after the day of this life is closed; and that *the night of death cometh*, when, as he assures us, John ix. 4. *no man can work*. Thus St. Paul, after the example of his great master, presses the same matter upon his Corinthians (2 Cor. vi. 2.) not to receive the grace of God in vain; for now is the accepted

sed in Pagnine's larger Lexicon. Ed. Colon. 1614. Both senses might be within the view of the author's, and then the full import of them is, *The dead no longer perform the works of worship and service to God, nor confess to him the breaches and omissions of them, when they had it in their power to perform them*. It is true that where the sense of confessing sins is intended, Hithpahel, another conjugation, is generally used to express it; and this has induced some to think it was appropriated solely to that conjugation; yet we find it in Hiphil, Prov. xxviii. 13. where it so certainly signifies such confession, that the passage will admit no other meaning. "*Who confesseth* (מוֹדֵה) Particip. in Hiph.) *and forsaketh his sins shall have mercy*." In this sense, the texts have a particular aspect to a penitentiary state, and consequently exclude all further trial or probation in the intermediate state; for if there be no confession of sins in Hades, there can be no place for repentance, and therefore none for reformation.

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time, the time when the means of acceptance under the gospel, are set before them; now is the day of salvation, the season wherein salvation is offered to them, and wherein they must work it out, if it ever be done at all. The same apostle in many places speaks largely of justification; but neither in his epistles, nor in any other part of scripture, do we read any thing of a justification in another world, that does not suppose an antecedent justification in this, tho' it is not full and final 'till we receive God's declarative sentence in judgment, and ourselves be admitted to our complete recompence of reward. As there is *none other name under heaven, given amongst men, whereby we must be saved, but only the name of our Lord Jesus Christ*, so neither is there any other rule or measure of obedience, by which we must be tried, than those duties which God has laid upon us, suitably to the dispensation which his providence has here placed us under; and this is the reason why St. Paul gives us so clear notice, that the business of the last day will be to enquire into the things done in the body, and to render to every man according to that he hath done in it, whether it be good or bad, 2 Cor. v. 10. from all which it follows, that we must stand or fall by what we have done in this world; for upon leaving it, we are no longer in the body, and therefore no longer in that state, upon which only, if St. Paul say true, the judgment

judgment of the last day will proceed; for if we are to receive according to what we have done in the body, that recompence cannot be changed by any thing afterwards done out of it; indeed it is absurd to suppose it, for the difference of duties in the body and out of it, cannot but be extremely great, and the objects and the senses they are to act upon so much changed, that a new probation would make a new Revelation necessary, with new conditions published, a new rule of conduct prescribed; and what is proper and suited to the one state, would be, in many instances, inconsistent with the other. In consequence of all this, there must again follow two sorts of process and judgment, one upon the things done in the body, and the other upon the things done out of it, in clear contradiction to what we have a little above cited from St. Paul. Such a train of unsurmountable difficulties do men's groundless fancies lead them to; whereas if we will refer the matter where we ought, that is, to the holy scriptures, which in many places directly teach, and in very many more plainly imply, that this is our day of trial, and that our whole future state is determined by it, the difference betwixt the two kinds of sins, *remissible* and *irremissible*, will resolve itself into neither more nor less than this, that the former kind may be repented of in this only day of saving repentance,

pentance, and so may have their pardon here, and the sinner *be washed, be sanctified, be justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God*; the certain consequence of which will be, the having that justification ratified and declared in the next world; but the other kind admits not of repentance in this world, and so cannot be pardoned either here or hereafter. As to any other difference betwixt the two kinds, in respect of forgiveness, there is none. A sinner may stand clear of the great blasphemy, and yet have fallen into other grievous sins, of which if he repent not, nor make his peace with God before he dies, even these his crimes become equally irremissible to him in the next world with the great blasphemy itself; and though, his guilt being less in degree, his punishment will, in kind, be less too; yet the certainty and duration of it is to both the same. Our Saviour's declaration is in no other sense consistent with the rest of scripture; in this it is consistent, rational, and clear, and therefore admits no other: and thus taken, as it affords not the least reason to expect any reparation to be made in another state, any renewing of our natures, any recovery of heaven that was lost; this surely ought to quicken all our care, and caution, and endeavours, that when our Lord cometh we may not be found sleeping, nor the thunder of that just rebuke

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rebuke of his, to the cast-off Jews, he applied to ourselves, *How often would I have gathered you together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not? but now the opportunity is past, salvation is hid from your eyes*."

* Matth. xxiii. 37.

* Luke xix. 42.

C H A P. IV.

IN the preceding chapter, impenitence and unpardonableness have been shewn to be the certain and immediate effects of the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost; and these were there with the stricter minuteness and enquiry examined and proved, both as constituting its specific difference, and also on account of the infinite concern ourselves have in the evidence thereof.—It may possibly still be demanded of us, how it comes to pass, that it should contract so deep a guilt, as to become not only great above all other sins, but totally desperate. Can it be consistent with a state of probation, such as this life is, that a miserable delinquent should be shut up, during that life, to an absolute irrecovery? Do we discover any thing in the case, that we may found such singular guilt and punishment upon? I apprehend we may; and that guilt and punishment are resolvable, partly into the nature of the sin itself, and partly into the just judgment of God consequent upon it. As to the nature of the sin, it is adding insult and defiance to impiety. Many, no doubt, that call themselves Christians, live
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and die with an utter insensibility and disregard of their Saviour, as if they *had none*, and of that Holy Spirit who must lead us to him, and yet incur not this sin; because, tho' they do not receive them, or make a proper use of their gracious offers, still they deny not the truth and power of them; they do not renounce and defy them; but this blasphemy proclaims actual war against them; and, as I said, hardens itself against all the means of conviction, which God has either given us, or designs for us; whence it comes to pass, that as there remains no further evidence to convince us, no further hopes to excite us, nor other aids granted to assist us, we must of course continue in the same obdurate impenitent state, and as so doing are utterly incapable of forgiveness. It must be acknowledged indeed, that truth does not weigh even with the same men, always equally; and it may happen, that some accidents shall so dispose their minds, that the reasons and motives which were ineffectual at one time, shall have their full moment and influence at another. But in the case before us, the just judgment of God has precluded all expectation of this sort; he who worketh in us both to will and to do, and without whose special grace, concurring with his own endeavours, it is impossible for a fallen sinner to extricate himself out of the snare of the devil, and to repent unto salvation, has absolutely consigned over all that fall

fall into this sin to a judicial blindness, and has given us the strongest assurances, that he will for ever withhold his grace from them, by declaring in the fullest and most express terms, that their sin shall never be forgiven. And since God saves not all men indiscriminately, since his spirit will not always strive with man, and the divine mercy must stop somewhere; it is not only just, but in this case, above others, necessary, when men have trodden under foot the Son of God, and accounted the blood of the covenant, wherewith they were sanctified, an unholy thing, and done despite to the spirit of grace, that is, in other terms, when they have run the extremest lengths of wickedness they can arrive to, that God should give them up to the hardness of their hearts, and for ever deny them the favour of that grace, and the operation of that Holy Spirit, whom they have treated with so open and superlative contempt. But however cogent this reasoning may appear (for it stands on the foundation of scripture, and receives its weight from thence), it will not perhaps easily make its way with some people; they are fonder of arguments than authorities, however attested, and would choose to be determined by the natural fitness and reason of things; and how, they will say, can we, upon the foot of reason and rectitude, reconcile what has been asserted, with the nature either of God or man? Can man, a reasonable being, when surrounded

surrounded with guilt, and misery the wages of it, be supposed wilfully and invariably to hold it out against God? or if this be deemed too hard for any stubbornness and impulse of his own, will the good and merciful God exert his power in such a case, to do that which the man's nature cannot do, seal up a wretch to absolute and irrecoverable impenitence? Such questions have been sometimes asked, and will again be asked, by the like kind of men, to the end of the world; they are plausible and taking at first, and yet, when fairly and impartially considered, are found to be nothing more than the effect of mens prejudices; they have made false estimates of God and themselves, and draw their conclusions from such estimates. Did we suppose that God Almighty, by any positive coercive influence, restrains them in an impenitent state, we might well be at a loss to reconcile such proceedings with our natural notions of the Deity; but it is quite another matter; God's mercy is so far from all just impeachment in the case, that, from the beginning to the end, it is one continued scene of the most rational love and kindness. He made man upright; he gave him an immortal nature, with knowledge and powers to preserve himself for ever happy; but he chose measures that must of course make him miserable: when he was fallen, still God provided him and his posterity a Redeemer; in all their waverings and

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spiritual conflicts, has continued to warn, admonish, and assist them; only where, upon persevering wickedness, the whole heart and spirit is defiled, and the temple utterly prophaned and unfit for his residence, then no wonder if he pronounce, as he is said to have done at his final disclaiming his once highly-favoured temple at Jerusalem, "Let us depart hence"; and less than this his infinite purity could not admit of. I have already remarked the instance of the fallen angels, as an evidence of the possibility of our incurring the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost; and here again we have in them a further example of the possibility of intelligent beings persevering in a state of the most ob-

* Joseph. de bello Jud. lib. vi. cap. 5. Tho' I take not upon me absolutely to vouch the certainty of what I have here alluded to, yet there are many strong circumstances to induce us to believe it.——The voice was not likely to be a pretence of the Jewish priests, as the subject of it was very ungrateful to them;—nor more likely to be hastily credited by the people, for the same reason.—The occasion upon which it must be supposed to have been uttered, to wit, the final dissolution of a religion and state of God's own appointment, and that had so long enjoyed his peculiar favour, often his miraculous interposition, demonstrates that it could neither be unbecoming nor unworthy of the Deity to give up the nation for their unparalleled ingratitude, with so signal a mark of his displeasure.——And lastly, we see God Almighty in this instance, as in his other dealings with men, in judgment remembering mercy. The voice was a notification to them, that God had now put an end to their ritual worship, had now dissolved their ecclesiastical polity, and they were to look for a perfecter religion, which was no where to be found but in Christianity.

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durate impenitence, under the actual knowledge and feeling of their miseries. Did even *they* repent with what is a real repentance, wit, true humiliation, unfeigned love of God, and deep contrition for having offended him, we may be permitted to say, they might still be accepted. But the sense of their loss takes a quite contrary turn in them to all it ought, and is made an occasion of sinning more and more; instead of submitting to God, they think of nothing but revenge, and mad schemes of counter-acting him; they know there could be no possibility of recovering from their fall, but by obeying and loving him, yet they hate him the more for that their fall; and their ingratitude, which will not own his once distinguished goodness to them, in the true spirit of that odious quality, denies and abuses it. Now if creatures of such superior understandings can be so hurried on by their unbridled passions, as, in spite of all they sadly know and feel, to persist, and provoke their own misery, the same causes may produce the same effects in hardened sinners of a lower rank, but in a degree proportioned to the different order and powers of each. Yet it must be acknowledged this account is but ill-suited to some admired systems: there are men that will not hear of a Deity that can suffer any of his creatures even to *make themselves* finally miserable. If things were so, there is an end, they say, of infinite

goodness, and so of God too. Are we then to suppose salvation reserved for the impenitent and obdurate also? we will make the supposition; it has been already proved (in chap. iii.) this cannot be brought about by any reformation of their own; and can we conceive any other way remaining, by which it might be effected, than under this alternative, that since their folly and wickedness have brought them to such a state of obduracy, that they cannot repent themselves, God will either accept them without a repentance, or force a repentance upon them? Do we then think his infinite mercy obliges him to the former? For the resolution of this and many other questions of the like kind, the following rule may be our best guide, that in all God's works his infinite wisdom ever does, and it is necessary ever should, preside, and direct his infinite goodness. To the truth of this proposition, reason and facts bear the fullest attestation; for if God was determined in his works by no other motive or measure but mere infinite goodness, this, as being infinite, must bestow every good within it's power, i. e. every creature or workmanship of God's hands must have all the perfections that it is within the power of God to give it; and nothing can be supposed to restrain his infinite goodness from doing this, but because it is wise and proper not to do it. Now it is most certain, from fact and the evidence of sense, that

that man, the world we live in, and the other creatures in it, are all subject to many inconveniences and defects, which they might have been exempted from, had God so willed; our faculties might have been enlarged, or others superadded, and the whole earth been as Paradise, or the *Garden of God*. It is therefore plain he acts by some other rule than an absolutely-unlimited profusion of bounty; that is to say, his goodness is guided by his wisdom, and the perfection of his own nature makes it necessary that it must be so. There is in the Divinity a variety of attributes, all essentially necessary to constitute such a being as God, and which are all consistent with, and regulate, and perfect each other. Infinite power is directed by infinite goodness, and would otherwise become the most insupportable tyranny: his goodness again is guided by wisdom, and would, without it, sink into weakness, softness, and folly; and reciprocally, both his wisdom and goodness are enabled to act, and attain their end by his infinite power; but not any one of these can he exercise in contradiction to another, because that would be to act inconsistently with his own nature.—The case standing thus, it is no difficult matter to say, whether God falls short of infinite goodness, if he doth not save impenitent and incorrigible sinners; for let us but ask, “Is it consistent with his wisdom and other attributes so to do?” and it is at once

determined.—It is a first principle of natural religion, that God forces no man to wickedness, and so to inevitable misery; and what makes this truth so clear and certain is, that the contrary represents God as repugnant to himself; the wisest, the justest, and the most gracious of beings, acting a most weak, unjust, and cruel part. But it is no less inconsistent with his nature to make wickedness happy, to receive a creature that hates him and all goodness into favour; these being things as much unsuitable to the perfection and harmony of the divine attributes as the other. His holiness will not admit any impure thing to appear before him; his justice demands the distinction of punishments to the wicked, and rewards to the righteous; his wisdom cannot expose his laws and his honour to contempt; even his truth must fail, and his engagements be falsified, if any unclean person (and such is every impenitent sinner) be suffered to *have any inheritance in the kingdom of God and of Christ**. It is therefore certain, that the mercy of God cannot be engaged to make men, whilst in a state of wickedness, happy; yet to prevent a final obduracy, will some men say, to snatch the sinner from the misery and ruin of his own perverseness, is not this a work worthy of the great and good God? Is his holiness in-

* Eph. v. 5,

jured by it? is not his power equal to it? could he not at once change the man, tho' without or against his own aim, to penitence and goodness, and so make him holy first, and happy after? Now that God must do this, thro' any necessity arising upon him from his own nature and attributes, no reason has ever yet, nor can be given; and that he will not do it, we have all the evidence that Revelation and his own declaration can give us on the one hand, and on the other it seems incompatible with his moral perfections that he should; for after all, to suppose virtue necessary to the making his creatures happy, and that God, in the plenitude of his power, should force them to become virtuous, and irresistibly keep them so, is to suppose an absolute inconsistency, what counter-acts itself, and destroys the thing it supposes; for so far as any thing is forced, so far it cannot be virtue, nor any qualification for the divine favour; it does not so much as partake of any moral nature; and therefore to make a creature virtuous by violence, is as great a contradiction to the nature of things, as it is to the justice and goodness of God to make a creature wicked, and so miserable by force.—

There have been wise and learned men that have carried the point so far as to declare, that man, as a rational creature, is necessarily a

free agency. And the wisdom of all government and it's laws suppose as much. A man that has the use of his reason, is considered by them as accountable for any thing he does amiss in such state; but not so, either before he attains it, or after he may happen by any means to be deprived of it; and such proceedings surely can be grounded on nothing less than a full assurance, that reason and free-agency ever mutually infer each other, or fall together; so that, if God was to do what some people will needs direct him to do, that is, absolutely force wicked men to duty, he must, as far as we can form a judgment of this matter, with their free-agency take away their reason too, and not only leave them no moral agents, but not so much as rational creatures.

In a word, these and other devices to discredit the just judgment of God, denounced on sinners, owe their rise to no sound reason, but partiality to our own follies. It is this that puts men upon forming such extravagant notions of the divine mercy, as are a dishonour to it, and injurious to God's other perfections, as if this was to over-rule all the rest.

Ratio absque libertate arbitrii non est. Damascen. lib. iii. Orthodox. Fid. c. 27. To wish therefore, saith St. Basil (as I have somewhere seen him quoted), that man had been so created that he could not have sinned, is to wish he had been created without reason.

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A flattering notion indeed it is to obnoxious daring men; and without care and steadiness in his duty, a man may soon be fond of it, as we are all of us but too apt to be of other flatterers, not because they tell us the truth, but because they lull us into security, and say peace, where there is no peace.

P. 8. This fourth chapter hath proceeded on a reasoning to which the Manichean principles bear the highest opposition; and the wit of Monsieur Bayle has given their arguments the utmost strength and colouring they are capable of. I had therefore intended a few remarks on the chief of those arguments, but found the subject too extensive for a note; this therefore is reserved for a separate discussion at the end of the Dissertation.

C H A P.

CHAP. V.

BUT can it then be consistent with christi-
an charity in ourselves, absolutely to
consign over any persons to a state of repro-
bation? and what, it may be asked, must be
our behaviour and conduct towards them?
We answer, to declare in general that it is pos-
sible for men to fall into this sin, and that who-
ever falls into it, falls at the same time into a
lost irrecoverable state, it is certain can be no
breach of Christian charity; because it is no
more than what Christ himself, and the apos-
tles directed by his Holy Spirit, have taught
us. So far we cannot mistake; but then as
to the particular persons who may be guilty
of it, we must be extremely cautious upon
what grounds we pass so severe a censure. In
the first age of the church it was possible to
pronounce with greater certainty, because the
apostles, and perhaps some others at that
time, were empowered with what scripture
calls the gift of discerning of spirits*, under
which was comprised, as I have shewn*, a

* 1 Cor. xii. 13.

* Chap. I.

power of discovering, upon extraordinary occasions, the secrets of the heart, and so of knowing whether the sin proceeded from that wilfulness and depravity, which constitutes blasphemy against the Holy Ghost. But this, and the other miraculous gifts, being granted only in aid of the infant state of the church, in evidence to its truth, and to support the authority and discipline of it, the necessity of them ceased of course, after Christianity had been preached, and irrefragably proved, and gained strength sufficient for its support in the ordinary way; and God therefore was pleased to withdraw them from the world, so that we are now left to the directions of natural prudence, to the written scriptures, and the ordinary aids of the spirit. But none of these confer the knowledge of other men's hearts, and therefore it may be but a wise caution in us, to suspend passing our peremptory sentence in the case; and to apply what has been said upon this sin, rather to quicken our own care and vigilance against all tendencies to it, than to put us upon rashly denouncing it against others. Let us therefore turn our view to another necessary, and not the least useful part of our subject, the principal leading causes to this sin. It is bred and reared to its enormous height, under a strong dislike and aversion to Christianity; and the occasion of this dislike, as far as we can judge from the example of former ages, or observation of

of the present, is ever taken up, either on account of the doctrines which it teaches, or the punishments which it threatens. Want of proofs, which, one would think, ought to be the main thing that could determine a rational man against it, has always somewhat else at the bottom. Bad men first dislike it, and then quarrel with it's evidence. As to the doctrines, no wonder if many of them occasion extreme disgust in proud and carnal minds. It is a fundamental principle in it, that man cannot, upon the bare strength of his own natural powers, work out his salvation; that he stands in absolute need of a Redeemer; that his nature is so sunk and debased beneath what God first made it, that without the atonement wrought for him by Jesus Christ, and his sanctification by the Holy Ghost, he cannot be accepted by the pure and absolutely-perfect God^b. All this stands in such direct contradiction to the pride, self-sufficiency, and high opinion which many are apt to conceive of their own deserts, that on the one hand some are for striking off all such unpleasing

^b Thus we read in scripture, that "all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God," (Rom. iii. 23.) But "God sent his only-begotten Son into the world to be a propitiation for our sin." (1 John iv. 9.) And as "no man cometh to the Father but by the Son," (John xiv. 6.) So being redeemed by the Son, and "sanctified by the Holy Ghost, we are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God," 1 Cor. vi. 11.

doctrines from Christianity; whilst others, seeing these points so strongly and clearly asserted in it's scriptures, and so closely connected there with the scheme of it, that there is no discharging them without destroying all certainty of language, and the rules of just interpretation, turn them against Christianity itself; and from the pretended folly, absurdity, and falshood of these, infer the falshood of that religion which is inseparably united with them. It is not a proper place here to enlarge upon these points; all that my subject requires is, to shew the danger of giving up the reins to our vanity, and cherishing groundless prejudices against any particular branches of Christianity, merely to please our fancies, or sooth our vices. It is in matters of faith as in moral practice; a man easily slides from error to error, as he does from vice to vice; and when he has renounced one necessary and essential article of our religion, such is the connection, he is immediately solicited, and in peril of parting with others, and possibly at length with the whole. Into nothing so much as this can we resolve the desertion and determined hatred of two the most eminent revoltors from Christianity, Julian and Porphyry. The humility which it indispensably required, the weakness charged upon their admired science, and which it so loudly proclaimed, and the absolute necessity of a Redeemer to the best of men, which it so much insisted upon, were the great rocks of

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stumbling

stumbling to them; their pride was infinitely piqued; they were made to see their own nakedness; the range of their idolized fancy was cut short; they were fettered down to the dictates of the meek and humble Jesus, and his Holy Spirit speaking in his apostles; and, thus mortified, they broke through all restraints, and set themselves to run that down, which had laid them so low. The same effect we still see produced from the same cause; the pride of men runs as high now as it did then; they would be *αυτοδιδασχοι*, and plan new systems and rules for God and themselves; and because Christianity assures them they are not fit for any such matter, and that we are neither to take from it, nor to make our own devices part of it, they despise it as unworthy of all liberal and exalted spirits like theirs. There is another and stronger offence and occasion of dislike, because it comes more home to them; and that is, the punishment threatened by Christianity to disobedience. Men that live not so as to have hopes from it, would be glad to get quit of it, and its terrors with it. Christianity itself therefore, we are told, has been given up on the one hand, on account of so incredible threats; and those threats been denied in a great measure by others, from an officious zeal to prevent the whole fabrick sinking under the unequal weight of them. Much reasoning and rhetoric has been called in to shew the cruelty,
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the non-necessity, and the unprofitableness of such punishment, the dishonour reflected on the Deity, and the disproportioned severity to the sinner. All these particulars have been largely and often examined by our divines; amongst these Dr. Horbery's accuracy and copiousness stand distinguished. It will be enough for myself to pass some strictures upon the conduct and reasons of such men as make them the ground and occasion of renouncing Christianity. The difficulties alleged respect either the kind or the duration of these punishments; let us see how justly they draw from either of them any argument against it. With respect to the first, God, they say, is represented, as by his own *positive act*, inflicting on wretches tortures beyond expression; whereas they pronounce *positive punishments* to be irreconcilable with God's perfections, and to imply such a vindictive spirit, as is repugnant to the natural notions we have of him^c. But they should first have examined whether themselves may not have mistaken the scriptures in this instance, and whe-

^c Divines often take positive punishments in a greater latitude, to denote the pains of sense in general, in opposition to the mere negative loss of happiness. What I intend by them here, and am arguing upon the presumption that they are so intended by the persons I am concerned with at present, is limited to arbitrary inflictions, or such punishments as are more or other than what arise from the constitution of rational beings, and the nature and order of things.

ther positive inflictions, which they take for granted to be the thing intended in scripture, are not misapplied in the case, and an invidious aggravation of their own. Wise and candid men generally admit some abatements from the strict severity of the letter. They observe the never-dying worm is certainly a metaphor, and upon the same reason the unquenchable fire may be figurative in like manner; so that, for aught any of us know, or can certainly deduce from scripture, the sufferings of the wicked so strongly represented there, by the most terrifying of all things in our present state, may be described in that manner only to give us the juster idea of the natural effects which their own wickedness will then have upon the reprobate. By the same figurative kind of speaking, we must account for the many places where God's judgments are spoke of as acts of vengeance; and the penal fire is said to have been prepared by him; for as vengeance, in the strict and proper sense of the word, implies such emotion as is incompatible with God; so, when applied to him, it either respects the disciplinary punishments of this life, for the amendment of sinners, and to be at the same time an example to others, which is an act of truest goodness; or, where it relates to the last judgment, it denotes the exclusion of wicked men from heaven, which they are in no sort fit for, and consigning them over to the rank and station, which, in the order
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and constitution of things must of course take place, and is therefore said to be prepared for them. But of this we shall have occasion to say more by and by; at present we conclude, that if any one, laying aside prejudice, and with all serious attention to the subject, cannot settle his conscientious belief of a real and literal fire in the future state of punishment; still this can give him no right or reason to quarrel with scripture, or the religion to which it beareth witness, because he has the figurative sense to recur to, and this not a mere evasive shift, but what can plead the style of scripture, the frequent usage of such figures there, and the subject-matter capable of such meaning, not without the authority of some learned and good men to confirm it^d. All these afford him room for a latitude

“ *The worm that dieth not, the fire that is not quenched,* and the like, are forms of speech that seem to be borrowed from those things which among men are most dreadful and affrighting, and to be calculated and accommodated to our capacities, and not so much intended to express to us the proper and real torments of hell, as to convey to us, in a more sensible and affecting manner, the sense of what the scripture says in general, “that it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.” Archbishop Tillotson’s *Posthumous sermons*, vol. v. p. 355, 356. 8vo. It would be easy to multiply authorities; I shall produce only one other, and that shall be from an ancient Greek commentator; Σκωληξ και πυρ κολαζοντας αμαρτωλους η συνειδησις εστιν εκασου, και η μνημη των προαχθεντων εν τω βιω τετω αιχρων, ητις ωσπερ σκωληξ κατα-

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of interpretation; and in the integrity of his heart he may be permitted to acquiesce in the *figurative* sense, and consider the literal as out of the intention of scripture. And yet, after I have said this, I cannot but subjoin, that on so high a subject as God's dispensations, some things, which appear hard and inexplicable to us in our present state, where we see but in part, may in the next, when the whole shall be unravelled and understood, be discovered to be not at all so; and therefore, as well he that adheres to the figure only, as he that thinks himself tied down to the letter, will do right to keep to the following rule, in some cases necessary, and in none more so than in this, *That each at the same time that he is persuaded in himself, judge candidly of the other.* Neither side is secure against mistakes, but both may and ought to agree in this, that God is just, and the wages of sin a most miserable bargain.—But is it not dangerous then to suppose there may be no such thing as a material fire in hell? Is not this to loose the reins of discipline, to weaken the terrors of the Lord, and give men encouragement in their vices? Alas! how poor the consolation, to think themselves secure from an external fire, when nothing can be more certain than this,

δαπανα, και ως πυρ φλεγει. Theophylact. in Marc. cap. ix. ad ver. 43. His commentaries are the more valuable, as they are abridgements from some of the best ancient fathers.

that

that, if they go on, and die in their sins, they must carry into the next world a fire in their own breasts, that will incessantly burn within them for ever. If therefore it be possible for any man to be so amazingly weak, as to please himself upon the supposition that has been made, and to take comfort that he can now believe himself delivered from the flames of hell, let him remember, altho' he is got clear of the letter, there still remains the whole force and spirit of the thing intended under it. And what that is, and whence it arises, we may learn from scripture. The happiness of the virtuous and good is there mainly rested upon their *seeing God*, the being admitted into his presence, and enjoying the blessed influence of that his vision, which scripture represents as our supreme felicity. On the other hand, therefore, we of surety conclude, that the punishment of the wicked must, in a very considerable part, consist in their being deprived of that vision, and the gracious influences of it, in proportion likewise to their demerits. Their infelicity is summed up in these few words, "They shall not see God," Heb. xii. 14. We are given to understand there is an *ιδιότροπος*, Acts i. 25. a place of their own, i. e. suited to the nature of wicked souls, in the intermediate state; and we have every reason to conclude there will be the same too in their last stations. God may have so ordered it, in the nature of things,

things, that our souls, *from their own propensity*, shall rise higher and nearer to his glories, or sink deeper into more gloomy and uncomfortable regions, in proportion to our qualities, and the temper and frame of our minds; none thus suffering more, none attaining less, than he deserves. Can any thing appear more equitable, and above all exception, than this? Can it give occasion, or grounds, to any prejudices against Christianity? does it contradict the scriptures, or any thing in them, that must of necessity be taken literally? or is it unsuitable to any divine attribute? On the other hand it removes one of the greatest difficulties upon this subject, to wit, that which arises from a comparative view of the lowest of those who are admitted to bliss, and the least culpable of those who are excluded out of it. The difference of the merits of the two seems not to answer to the difference of infinite happiness in heaven on the one side, and infinite misery in hell on the other. But if the account we have given be right, we see then the frame of men's souls determines their situation and happiness: an holy and heavenly temper makes them susceptible of the blessed influences of the divine vision upon them, and the more, according as the degree of it is stronger and perfecter in them; God's infinite purity receives them nearer to his throne in proportion thereto; and pours his light and glory the more strongly upon

upon them, as they are capable of it*. Thus there are, from the nature of the thing, in heaven many mansions, many degrees of holiness and happiness in it; and there are in like manner many mansions too for those in the contrary state: the less their depravity, the nearer they stand to the confines of the blessed; and the less their sufferings; and again, the more wicked and abandoned, the further they fall from the only fountain of comfort, and their misery is proportionably aggravated; and all this, not by a positive arbitrary act of God, independent of the reason and relation of things, but by the original, wise, and holy constitution of them, settled from the beginning, or, as we call them, the laws of nature; and that, as necessarily as in this our system, the purer and more refined matter rises higher, and the grosser and duller sinks down lower towards its earthy centre. — Exclusion then from God and heaven is the sad and certain portion of incorrigible sinners; but what, it will be asked, are those effects and consequences upon that exclusion, which can answer to a worm that dieth not, and a fire that

* Here we may observe the wisdom and justness of that preference, which our religion gives to love or charity; for in heaven all is purity and perfection of love; and the stronger our souls are imbued with it, the higher we shall rise, and approach the nearer to God, for God is love; and therefore, saith the apostle, charity or love never faileth, for if love could cease in heaven, it would be no longer heaven.

is not quenched? That the wicked disposition and passions of excluded sinners go along with them, is most certain; because, if their vicious natures were purged, their evil habits corrected, their passions subdued, they had not been excluded at all; these disqualifications, so entirely irreconcilable with heaven, being the very thing that shut them out from it; and as they go with them, so they are sure to stick by them; the same bad hearts, the same tendencies to evil, and thirst after false delights, the same utter distaste for virtuous pleasure, continue and shackle them down to their state, whilst time but rivets their chains, and makes their evil tempers more inveterate and confirmed. What the issue and event of all this must be to their happiness, we may form some idea from what we see at present of the workings of human passions, and the powers of conscience; the wounds of the latter, we know, are often, even in this world, intolerable to the sinner; but what are these to the tumults and stabbing reproaches he must feel under his final and full-blown miseries? to be convinced at last, by sad experience, that he has absolutely forfeited all the great and glorious privileges, to which God's mercy, through his obedience, had entitled him; to be shut out from his presence, and the mighty felicities consequent upon it; to be left to the turn and cast of mind, which his own depraved appetites have brought upon him; to find himself
fallen

fallen at such an immense distance from every consolation ; with all his sins and follies about him ; with violent cravings, and nothing to gratify them ; with enraged passions, and nothing to sooth or calm them ; with a knowledge that this his sad state is fixed and irreparable ; what an idea of complicated misery does this convey to us ? Let us again reflect on what we cannot but have frequently observed, in men enslaved to their passions, and disappointed under them ; what mighty breaches upon their repose and peace of mind, will a cross accident in their interests, in their pleasures, in their humours, a convenience they want, or but think they want, produce in them ? I will take an instance in the wanton and vain-glorious worldling, who riots here in luxury, and would think himself undone without the glitter and state of power, and place, and pre-eminence, while his heart swells with scorn of all beneath him ; with how incomparable anguish, will such a person, see the beggar, now full of sores, or his poor, but virtuous and humble neighbour, then set high above him in glory and happiness, and his wisdom applauded by God and his angels ; whilst himself, under the weight of his own folly, is sunk into scorn and neglect, abject wretchedness, and utterly unfurnished circumstances ! How emphatically true will it be of him and his situation, “ *there is weeping and gnashing of teeth !* ” When his pride and indignation,

on this sad reverse, burn within him; when his violent and inflamed appetites find, in that world, no object suited to them; nor have, in the figurative language of scripture, "*one drop of water there to cool them;*" how justly and strongly is this represented by "*a worm that dieth not, and a fire that is not quenched!*" I might, were the example given not sufficient, carry on the argument to every other vicious habit, for each will then blow up it's own fiercest fires, in the guilty breast, which it was here fostered and domineered in. Should we suppose, as I do not see why we may not, that there may be some kind of communication and converse betwixt the wretched beings, whose degree of wickedness has brought them together to the same unhappy mansions; must we therefore conclude any lightening of their calamity, any mutual solace or consolation from such company? Alas! this too is but the fire of hell in a figure, and everlasting burnings; for where all are wicked, and all agitated by envy and hate, by rage and fury, and continual disappointments, what can follow but the flames of endless contention and animosities, of mutual reproach, upbraidings, and confusion? All this is according to the course and order of things, and arises from the natural fitnesses and relations of them. Incorrigible sinners are forsaken of God, only because they are incorrigible; and they are miserable for the same

same reason; their own false love, and unbridled passions, are their chosen guides, and their tormentors are those very passions^f.—But there is still another matter which adds to the diffidence, and heightens the dislike that some men conceive against Christianity; for scripture threatens misery not only extreme in kind, but in it's duration infinite too, which they think utterly inconsistent with the nature and goodness of God. Here I apprehend the objection must be answered another way; for though the kind of punishment is capable of a softer sense than the letter itself imports; and there be some passages respecting the punishment, that do not necessarily imply more than the *pœna damni*, or punishment of loss; yet there are others, which are utterly incapable of any other meaning than the actual feelings of misery, and this, I apprehend, literally and strictly interminable; such, for instance, as describe it by a perpetual disquietude, or the having no rest day or night^g; and the being tormented day and night for ever and ever^h. Add to this, that the unquenchable fire, and the worm that dieth not, whatever figurative sense we would give to

^f He that would see this matter handled at large, as well with respect to the happiness of good men, as the miseries of the wicked, in another world, may find it done in Dr. Scot's *Christian life*, with all that masterly strength and fulness, which might be expected from such a writer, on such a subject, part. i. c. 3.

^g Rev. xiv. 11.

^h Ch. xx. 10.

them, at least seem to import these two things; first, that more than mere loss, even real and sensible misery, is included under them. Secondly, that this misery, expressed by fire, with the peculiar property that it should not be quenched, and by a worm with the like special property, that it should not die, must itself be everlasting; otherwise, there is a fundamental defect, and discordance, betwixt the figure and the thing figured by it; for if the punishment is finite, then, altho' it be a fire, it is not unquenchable; and though it be a worm, yet neither is it such as dieth not. To explain these passages therefore, and some others to the same purpose, of a limited duration, is a liberty that sober sense and interpretation seem in no sort to admit, for words cannot speak more explicitly.—It is certainly ill-suited to the ingenuity and integrity of a good man, and much more to the undeviating truth of Christianity, to awe the world with false terrors; yet neither duty, prudence, nor charity, suffer us to conceal or under-rate such as are true, which would embolden many to sit easier under their sins, and make lighter of them than, bad as the world is, they do at present. Upon the evidence, therefore, of scripture, it is, that so we speak, and so believe. And yet no argument is, in any wise, to be drawn from hence against Christianity, unless it could be carried so far as to prove the soul is naturally mortal;
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from whence it might follow, that if the punishment cease not, God must, by his special act, continue the wicked in being, for the sake of punishing them; nothing of which is either true in itself, or has any thing to countenance it in the holy scripture. Now if the soul be immortal, as it undoubtedly is, and which we may here be permitted to take for granted, then we ask, can reason shew that the punishment will not continue, whilst the sinner continues, as in his future state of punishment he ever will do, to sin on? Reason itself, under it's present lights, if the case be referred to it, must conclude the contrary; in it's state of heathenism, and with a strange mixture of mistaken fancies, it admitted as as much as this; even they that were supposed capable of renovation, are represented as attaining it, only by a continued series of punishments, till the guilt should be purged off. The opinion of Plato's school is finely drawn out on this head by Virgil, in his *Æn. lib. vi.*

" ————— exerceantur pœnis, veterumque malorum

" Supplicia expendant: aliæ panduntur inanes

" Suspensæ ad ventos; aliis sub gurgite vasto

" Infectum eluitur scelus, aut exuritur igni.

[" Quisque suos patimur manes, exinde per amplam

" Mittimur elysium, & pauci læta arva tenemus¹"]

" Donec

of

¹ The two lines within the crotchets much encumber the sense, and break the connexion: after the description

“ Donec longa dies, perfecto temporis orbe,
 “ Concretam exemit labem, purumque reliquit
 “ Ætherium sensum, atque, auræ simplicis ignem.”
 ver. 739, &c.

To return, the objection we have been last considering, tho' every aid that pains and art

of the different methods of purgation, and the poet's bringing us from thence to elysium, we are amazingly continued in a state of purgation, *Donec longa*, &c. Ruæus would solve the difficulty by giving *donec* here the sense of *quando*, and confirms his opinion by observing that Virgil does not say *donec exemerit*, in the subjunctive future, but *exemit*, in the indicative præter-tense, and so makes the sense to be, *When time hath purged off our stains*; but I doubt the use of *donec*, in the sense of *quando*, as he would have it; his own instance from Hor. od. iii. lib. 1. *Donec gratus eram*, &c. in it's full and true sense is, *As long as I was pleasing*; and so in *Donec eris felix*, *multos numerabis amicos*; but this is inconsistent, and makes the passage nonsense. Dr. Jortin, in his sixth dissertation, with better judgment, puts the two lines in a parenthesis; and I have therefore so wrote them here; yet I cannot think this fine passage quite cleared, in this way, of all its embarrasss. If I may be permitted to offer my own conjecture, it is thus: possibly the poet may have done here, what he has done elsewhere, left an imperfect verse, not finding it easy to fill it up to his satisfaction, and so stopt short at *Quisque suos patimur manes*, and then going on, *Donec longa*, &c. In this way the sense flows smooth, is full, and perfectly connected with what went before, and what comes after; even the break itself is not ungraceful; we stand to give a sigh. In after-times the half verse, by some too officious hand, might be attempted to be filled up, with the addition also of another verse to finish the thought. But this is offered with submission, and the reader will allow the conjecture just as much weight as he sees fit.

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and argument could furnish, have been called in, has not foundation to support it. It is impossible to prove, upon any foot of reason, that the sufferings of the wicked cannot be everlasting. The reasonings of those, who make the objection, proceed upon the incompatibility of God's inflicting such perpetuated punishments with his goodness and justice. It is to natural religion, and the reason and fitness of things, they appeal; and the punishments, which are here the matter in question, arise from the laws of nature, and that very reason and fitness of things. God, the parent of nature, has, from his own infinite and invariable rectitude, appointed a constitution of things, by which holiness and happiness, and sin and misery, are suited to each other; and therefore, notwithstanding some inconsiderable variation in this state of trial, they must at length inseparably go together. Wicked men's souls, utterly depraved as they have made them, are still immortal; they naturally live for ever; and with their vicious temper and habits, and utter disrelish for God and goodness, which they have contracted, they will go on to sin for ever, and so must be miserable for ever also; from their own natural tendency, they fall to a rank and place suited to their qualities: and in that state, if there were nothing

thing else to make them miserable, their own evil dispositions, and untamed passions, cannot fail to do it, and to be, as I have shewn, in the exactest measure and proportion, their own tormentors.

CHAP. VI.

WHOWER has paid any attention to the subject of the preceding chapters, cannot, I presume, but acknowledge, it must be of great use and importance to have it rightly understood. And I say this, not only with regard to the bold and daring sinner, who is in the high road to the sin against the Holy Ghost, but peculiarly to such tender minds, as really are not in the way of it, yet have fears and scruples about it. Our follies, or fancies, are frequently too operative, even in giving judgment against ourselves; and the busy tempter here, as elsewhere, is ever at hand, to take the advantage, and turn it to our discouragement, or even to despair. We cannot therefore do a more charitable act, than to guard the feeble-minded against misapprehensions, or to support and recover them out of them. It is principally for these, that this concluding chapter is calculated; and for their comfort under or against their terrors of this sort, I cannot recommend a better and more certain maxim than the following: that their very uneasiness and fears, and abhorrence of the thing, is itself proof they are
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are not guilty of it. The truth of this maxim, and the wisdom of applying it, may easily be deduced from what has been proved above. Here, as example may possibly sink deeper, and work stronger, on weak minds, than rules and reasonings, I shall shew the extreme necessity of such a guard, by selecting an instance full to the purpose, the most extraordinary in it's kind, and of authenticity beyond all doubt or dispute. There is not then in history, a more terrible example of the effect of a false judgment in this case, than that of *Francis Spira*, a serious, sensible man, of reputable rank, and who had, upon a principle of conscience, and mature deliberation, left the church of Rome, and embraced the doctrines of the Reformation; but was, after all, so terrified with the apprehension of the utter ruin of his fortunes, and the consequences thereof, a starving wife and family (all which the persecuting spirit of the church of Rome threatened him with), that, contrary to the thorough conviction of his own heart, he publicly abjured his new and purer faith, and vowed all future obedience to the principles and doctrines of the papacy. Now, tho' there was something exceeding criminal in this revolt, something that must for the present put him out of a state of salvation, and totally fix him there, without a particular and deep repentance; yet it did not of itself absolutely and irrecoverably do it. It was not the abuse of

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of the miraculous gifts of the Holy Ghost, nor a renunciation of Christianity, of which those gifts were the evidence; it had not so much as any respect at all to the evidences of our religion, and was not a malicious, but a cowardly desertion; and therefore wanted the principal signatures of the irremissible sin; yet the poor man was so struck, on reflecting upon the shameful prevarication, as to conclude it could be nothing less than the irremissible guilt; sometimes calling it the sure sign of his reprobation, and sometimes expressly the unpardonable sin against the Holy Ghost. In a word, the principal texts in the epistle to the Hebrews, relative to this subject, were all turned against himself; and, notwithstanding the almost constant visits, exhortations, and encouragements of numerous eminent divines, and others, the notion had taken such deep root in him, that he was not able to shake it off; but, under incomparable anguish of mind, he persisted in maintaining and deploring to the day of his death (which happened after about six months extreme misery), that his sin was of the peculiar kind which could never be forgiven, because done wilfully, and against conviction^k. Had this unhappy

^k The account here given is extracted from the history of this affair published in Latin, and drawn up by several separate hands, all of them of rank and character, and who gave a narrative of what themselves were eye-witnesses to.

happy man but rightly understood the case in question, that there is but one irremissible sin, and that nothing is that one sin, which is not done with malice prepense against our Redeemer and the truth of his holy religion, he had looked upon his own guilt in another light; instead of giving himself up to despair, he had seen the true, and the practicable way, was to quicken his diligence, to fly to penitence and prayers, to acknowledgments, and reparation of his breaches, by faith unto the end. And had he fought in this manner, we cannot doubt he had found pardon and peace at the throne of grace.

And now all that remains for me further, is here, in the conclusion, to address myself to our modern unbelievers. If they think the freedom I shall take too great, I plead the integrity of my aim; and the shortness of my application, at least, will not be displeasing to them. May they then consider in time, on how dangerous, how dreadful a precipice they stand; the guilt, at best, exceeding great. We will not indeed charge them with the irrecoverable blasphemy: if levity only, if inattention lead them, 'tis true, this is not the case: the door of mercy is still open, a retreat

Amongst those who visited, and have given some account of Spira, was the famous Vergerius, bishop of Justinople; to whose renouncing the Romish communion, and with it his bishoprick, and all his future worldly prospects, this sad scene not a little contributed.

is still possible, and much it behoves them to make it betimes; for if, as it may be, they proceed from errour to malicious wickedness here, they are, even before they enter upon their eternal state, lost for ever. Let them view, in their just light, the proud examples they are apt to plume themselves upon, their great martyrs and confessors, the Julians and the Vaninis of their sect, who have died with bravery, if to die in open contempt of the greatest mercy that was ever shewn to man, be true bravery. But how fatal the delusion, if that confirmed adherence of theirs to their principle was at last not constancy, but judicial blindness, and a seal of their destruction? We know this is one special penal consequence of this sin, and carries in it very much to alarm, nothing to encourage, a serious and thoughtful man; for where is the wisdom or sense of that ambition, which affects to be ranked with men, who, if they were in the right, died without hope; and, if they were in the wrong, have made themselves miserable by it for ever?

is still possible, and much it behooves them to make it betimes; for if, as it may be, they proceed from error to malicious wickedness, there they are, even before they enter upon their eternal state, lost for ever. Let them view, in their just light, the proud examples they are apt to place themselves upon; their great iniquity and conceits, the Jewish and the Vanities of their sect, who have died with bravery, it is to be in open contempt of the greatest mercy that was ever shewn to man, be true bravery. But how fatal the delusion, if that confirmed absence of theirs to their principle was at last not constancy, but judicial blindness, and a seal of their destruction? We know this is one special penal consequence of this sin, and carries in it very much to alarm, nothing to encourage, a tedious and thoughtful man; for where is the wisdom or sense of that ambition, which affects to be ranked with men, who, if they were in the right, die without hope; and, if they were in the wrong, have made themselves miserable by it for ever?

A
R E V I E W
O F T H E
R E A S O N I N G S
I N
Monsieur B A Y L E,
On the Entrance of SIN and MISERY
into the World.

REVIEW

OF THE

REASONINGS

IN

Montagu BAYLE

On the Entrance of Boy and Master
into the World.

A

REVIEW, &c.

IN the preceding Dissertation, after having explained the nature of the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost, I was led to consider the sad effects of it, upon the state of the blasphemer, both in this world and the next. These were but just warnings against so deep a guilt; the doctrines, however, are highly ungrateful to some men, and, rather than admit them, they call in the goodness of God, though in contradiction to his truth and assurances, to witness against them. Hence arose the necessity of asserting the justice and equity of the Deity, in permitting the entrance of sin into the world, and consequential misery as the punishment of it. And here it was proper not only to appeal to the authority of the inspired writings, but to cast what light I was able upon this subject, from natural evidence, and the reason of the thing. By the first of these, I flattered myself with the hopes of giving some satisfaction to such persons, as, being friends to revelation, and acknowledging the authenticity of scripture, yet have, in this instance, their doubts and perplexities about the sense of it, and wish to conceive more distinctly

on matters so nearly concerning them. The point of reason likewise was by no means proper to be omitted, the author being fully convinced, that, although much vain triumph hath been sometimes assumed by our adversaries in this kind of contest, yet all the difficulties alledged by them have their foundation not in true and solid reason, but in their own mistakes or abuse of it; in sophisticated reasonings, and what St. Paul calls, *cunning craftiness of men, whereby they lie in wait to deceive*. (Ephes. iv. 14).—On this occasion it might probably occur to the reader, as it did to myself, that Monsieur Bayle has prescribed a quite contrary track to us. That celebrated writer has, it seems, very pressingly cautioned us against venturing to argue with any one, that denies a gracious God could permit his own workmanship, to fall into sin and misery upon any other footing than that of scripture; and declares that the objections to his power or goodness, in such a case, are utterly insoluble by reason; nay, that reason itself, and the conclusions it must draw from it's own principles, will turn against us. And this is not only asserted by him in the character of a Manichean, but the notion is expressly acknowledged and avouched for his own, in his explanations at the end of his great work¹. This has induced me to examine the princi-

¹ See the second article of explanations, at the end of his Dictionary.

pal matters I found there, which affect the subject I have been speaking to, or my own manner of treating it; and yet I could not have been prevailed upon to enter so largely into it, but that I found the arguments urged by this author, equally suitable to the libertine principles of many in our own times; for we are not to think, that, because Manicheism is dead, their great argument is dead too. There is something in it too soothing to the pride and follies of man to be easily shook off; it resolves all his misconduct into necessity, after which it is an easy matter to despise the threats of punishment in another life, for what could not be avoided, and what therefore he is really inculpable for, in this. Such an argument is as useful to those who would shift the blame of their ungoverned passions from themselves, and either impeach the justice, or dispute the power of one God, as it could be to them who laboured to prove the necessity of introducing two. There is even a strong similarity betwixt the evil principle of the Manichees, and what some call the intractable nature of the materials God had to work upon, and which, they say, obliged him, by a necessity superior to his power, to introduce into his works, such a quantity of evil as was inherent in them^m.—Few books are

^m I here refer to an anonymous tract, published a few years since, intituled, *A free inquiry into the nature and origin*

are in more hands, or, by many, more greedily read, than Bayle's. I wish we had not reason to think, his great blemishes are, to some people, his best recommendations; which adds to the necessity of guarding against the ill effects of them. Of the answers that may have been given to him on this head, none in my retired situation have reached me, except what we find in Dr. Law's learned Commentary on King's origin of evil. And here indeed the sophistry of his libertine fancies is very solidly exposed; yet not without this inconvenience, that it is done in a manner too philosophical for many, and so connected with deeper researches, that they either may not be able to go along with his reasonings, or find them too unpalatable to engage them to take pains in so elaborate a work as his. As to what myself offer in the following pages on this subject; my first aim is to lead the less learned or implicit admirers of Bayle, so far into the argument, as easily to see the futility of his reasoning, and be sufficiently armed against the dangerous suggestions thrown out, as upon other occasions in the *Critical dictionary*, so with more assiduous art and industry on this, which is of greater importance than all the rest. And in

origin of evil, in six letters. It discovers abilities and spirit, that in a better cause might have done credit to his name, which he has not chose to affix to it.

the doing of this, my desire was to be found not to have copied from others, and yet not boasting of a train of reasoning and arguments absolutely new; for I apprehend he that would sit down to vindicate Providence only by reasons never before heard of, would quit himself but little to his reputation. The subject has been debated from age to age, and the best arguments oftenest recur; yet change of time and circumstances give them a new air and cast; from variety of manner and disposition, and different lights, the objections take another form.—And the same is true of the answers to them: the last book I have mentioned, as almost all others, is an instance: the very *principium indifferentiae*, which Archbishop King's book stands upon, is no new one^a, and yet this is not any abatement to it's merit; and the strongest and most needful arguments in his learned commentator, for the vindication of Providence, have had their use aforetime; but from the manner of management, the position in which they are viewed, and the confirmation arising to them, from the philosophical light in which he considers them, they are at least as much new in him, as they were in those whom he ingenuously re-

^a The learned Jesuit Raynaud, is quoted by Bayle, as maintaining it: see Dict. under ROBARUS, lett. F. and Dr. Law, on King's origin of evil, not. 49. refers to Episcopus and Limborch, as in the same notion.

fers to, and who had, with much honour and reputation, urged them before him.—But to return to Mr. Bayle; his reasoning upon this occasion is carried on in so diffuse and declamatory a way, as makes it necessary to contract it into a narrower compass, yet I shall take care to give it all its force and weight. It may not be improper to observe further, that the author of the Critical dictionary has gained some advantage in the irregularity of his arguments on this head; we find them scattered, some in one part of his work, some in others, and many repeated upon every occasion. The loose disposition keeps the debate ever on foot; gives no clear and just view of it: you are not to see the strength of the enemy; but, by thus dividing his forces, he makes them often thought more numerous than they are; and, like the Velites of old, keeps up the alarm, and perplexes, or perhaps confounds a reader, more by the suddenness and frequency of his attacks, than by any weight or strength of his reasons. I shall endeavour to connect his arguments, and consider them in their natural order and arrangement. At the bar of reason then, according to this author, it will be pleaded, and cannot there be refuted, “That it is essential to a benefactor, not to bestow favours which he knows would be abused, to the ruin of him whom they are given to; that therefore, in the case of free-will, if God could not prevent the abuse of
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it, he ought not to have given it at all; but if he could have prevented it (by changing the heart and giving a man a relish of good things), he was bound to do it: and this, he adds, is what God might easily have done if he would.* Let us then try this argument on the principles of reason, that is, at the tribunal to which it appeals. The force then of this famous dilemma, turns on the issue of these two questions: Whether God could have prevented the abuse of free-will, if he pleased? and whether, in case he could not, this laid any obligation upon him not to grant it at all? The first is, we see, affirmed in the close of the argument; and he warrants this his assertion by pointing out the way or method whereby all such abuse might have been prevented, which was, by a change in the heart, and giving man a relish of good things; that is to say, if he mean any thing to the purpose, such a relish as should be, upon all occasions, infallibly effectual to secure him from sinning. But the difficulty is left behind him still: for it is a reasonable, nay a necessary enquiry, and the whole depends upon it, how we are to suppose this change, so important and so easy, might have been wrought on the heart of man, a rational creature. Surely order and wisdom, and the nature of things, will say, by rational me-

* See Bayle, under PAULICIANS, lett. E.

thods,

thods, and rational motives, that is, by teaching, exhorting, and aiding man in a way suited to his nature; by hopes and fears, from the powerful sanctions of rewards and punishments adapted to work on rational minds; by implanting in him conscience, an ever-present and awful monitor, to urge these warnings, and be itself in no small degree, an executor of them in every individual; and with these, a quick sense of duty, and strong natural ideas of the amiableness of virtue, and deformity of vice, either actually innate to him, or as easily arising from his reason as if it was. Now all these helps God abundantly provided; they are all parts or branches of natural religion; reason dictates them; we feel them in our own breasts, and yet no such change was effected as to prevent the abuse of free-will; but man sinned, and still sinneth, and misery followed, and continues so to do. Rational methods, and rational motives, therefore, cannot be the thing in the author's view; somewhat further was clearly necessary and intended; and this could not be less (for nothing less would answer his end) than an heart, absolutely and infallibly determined, by its Maker, to duty and true happiness only. Here then ourselves must appeal to reason, and ask, what must have been the consequence of such a measure? the thing speaks itself; man deprived of his liberty, a workmanship inconsistent, unworthy of God, and degrading to

us; for had he created man a necessary agent, he must have precluded all sort of desert in us, which yet is the glory of his creation. If there be free-will, some evils may follow from the abuse of it; but if there be none, all is mere dead machinery; there cannot be such a thing as one virtuous action done in the world. But could it suit the wisdom of God to constitute such a system of things, as goodness should have no place in; as should leave no room for all those moral and religious graces, which, wherever they are found in any of his creatures, are more pleasing to the wise and holy Creator, and redound more to his honour, shew something more worthy his power and excellence, than all the infinite variety of art and contrivance through the whole material world? Again, with regard to ourselves, put the case, that God had laid us under an invincible necessity in our actions; will not reason inform us, that this must have been not only a dishonour to human nature, but an high detriment to the happiness of all those who now persevere in their duty? must have thrown the most mortifying abatement into the pleasure of doing good in their present state; and above all, the noblest and most rational satisfaction in their bliss hereafter must be lost to them; without any consciousness of worth, their joys would want their best and noblest relish, and become insipid themselves, as their service unpleasing to God; so that the wisdom,

dom, justice, and goodness of God were all concerned to provide for the free-agency of man, unless we will be so ridiculous as to say, that God should have given freedom to some and not to others, or deny even to those who would best deserve his favour, and make a faithful use of it, this their glory and proper felicity, lest the wicked and unworthy should make an ill use of it. Bayle, however, will not give thus up his Manichean; and, to cut this matter short, affirms for him, what, if true, would go a great way to prove, that neither the service of God, nor the happiness resulting from it, is dependent on free-will; for to be convinced of this, he says, "we need only be put in mind of the state of paradise, where God is loved and served perfectly well, and yet the blessed do not enjoy free-will." This indeed is a round assertion; but all reason lies on the other side. The change in heaven is incomparably for the better, and in no sort for the worse; but the very nature of the blessed would, by being deprived of their freedom, be changed, and they must sink into a lower class of beings, unfit inhabitants of heaven, even below the degree of moral agency. That their happiness is advanced there, by their free-agency, we have seen already; that their virtue and goodness would be so too, cannot possibly be disputed; for most surely

Vid. Art. MARCIONITES, lett. F.

there

there is more merit in serving with freedom and choice, than by strict mechanism, or, as it is called, physical necessity. But, possibly, some may think our happiness not sufficiently secured any other way. Angels themselves in heaven have fallen, and may not we, unless necessitated, do so too? What the first state of angels was, we have but short hints, and yet from that little we may conclude, that it was a state of some kind of probation; and to those that stood, besides their own virtue, and the glories and rewards of their integrity, which they now enjoy, the misery of those that fell is infinite warning to them; their very free-will is their security; and beings intelligent and wise as themselves, with their lights, their bliss, such experience, such powers to do their duty, such exemption from all wants, and all temptations against it, will (I had almost said, but that it may be misconstrued, *can*) never choose to deviate from it, any more than they can choose misery, or wish their own destruction. I need not give myself or the reader the trouble of pursuing the parallel in our own case; it is obvious, and answers in every particular: I shall only add one thing further, common also to men and angels; that all this extreme felicity will produce such consummate love of God, from whom it flows, and on whom it depends, that liberty will be so far from endangering our perseverance in holiness there, that one

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cannot conceive it possible, for any thing else but the want of power to make a free choice, which could ever induce us to depart from it^a. The author of the Critical dictionary easily foresaw he could not fail to be hard pressed on the subject of liberty, and therefore had provided an expedient to turn the battery of Christians upon themselves; which was, to shew, that free-agency must, at all events, be admitted; God might have infallibly preserved at once both the liberty and innocence of man, by over-ruling the heart, without violating free-will; and of this he gives the doctrine of grace in evidence, as what operates infallibly, without infringing on liberty. This, you will say, is a quick transition, and removes the debate out of the bounds of reason, to a point of revelation; yet since he, or his Manichean, will have it so, we must follow him, and it will appear, that his arguments are as incompetent from one as from the other. Let us hear his proofs: "The most rigid Christian sects acknowledge at this day, that the most efficacious grace" (by which every one knows they meant irresistible grace) "does not destroy the liberty of a sinful man; and that the decrees of preserving mankind, constantly and

^a See Abp. King's Note, lett. T. p. 319, 320. of Dr. Law's edition, 1758, which is desired to be remembered in all references to the English translation.

invariably

invariably in a state of innocence, how absolute soever they had been, would have permitted all men to perform their duty freely*. Now to serve his purpose here, three things are necessarily to be supposed, not one of which can be granted.—The authority of the Christian sects whom he refers to.—the attestation of Scripture to such irresistible grace.—and the consistency of it with free-will. But first, his authors are strong predestinarians, or bold enthusiasts. In the next place, Scripture, whence we know all we know of grace, gives us neither assurance nor encouragement to expect irresistible grace. There were times when the insolence of papal decisions, and the folly of scholastic distinctions, could bear down scripture and common sense; but both have at length recovered, at least among ourselves, their due honours. All the passages on which such a notion is founded, have been shewn to be mistaken, or misapplied by them; and the whole tenour of scripture, and its pressing and repeated warnings, in-

* See Marcionites, Let. F. D. We enquire not here, whether what is urged by Bayle from divines, was his own real sentiments; that is not of consequence to his argument, because, if their opinions are not his own, yet the reasoning is; the fallacy of which, therefore, it was incumbent on us to shew; it being his great artifice and aim in them, to take advantage from the indiscretions of some sects, and their leaders, to perplex the question, and so make way for what he sets out with, the necessity of giving up all reasoning about it.

form us, we may grieve the Holy Spirit, Eph. iv. 10. we may resist it, Acts vii. 5. Mat. xxiii. 37. we may even quench it, 1 Thes. v. 19. we may fall from it, Heb. vi. 6. 2 Pet. i. 10. If there be any instance where God may be supposed to overbear the will by a special agency, or power irresistible, it is most likely to be in extraordinary cases of his government of the world; as where the pride and fury of man would counteract his providence, or are meditating some grievous mischief to his faithful servants; and yet here too, the purposes of God, at least for the much greater part, may be, and no doubt are, brought about by his wise disposition of things, in the natural and ordinary way; but if at any time it be done by forcible constraint, and determination of the will, there I may say, and plead the authority and cogent reasoning of Archbishop King for it, that it is as much miraculous as his suspending any other law of nature whatsoever, and therefore must be extremely rare. To suppose therefore,

• *Ut liberæ sint (viz. electiones), Deus creando quasi lege sanxit, eò enim quod naturam electione utentem illis dedit, usum etiam ejus concessit. Sine vi igitur legi creationis illatâ impediri non possunt. Fatemur posse Deum cum legibus naturæ dispensare; at ut id frequenter fiat, quis postulabit, aut ferat? — Mutare voluntatem, impedire electionem, non minùs leges naturæ violat, quàm solis cursum interrumpere. Est enim agens liberum nobilius sole, leges ejus naturales magis sacræ habendæ,*

therefore, that God's grace might, and ought at all times to have prevented free-agents from sinning, is to suppose, he has made a system with laws which he shall be continually breaking; has given man a power and faculty, and yet destroys the use of it; than which, one knows not how to conceive a greater absurdity in the work of a rational creature, and much more in God's creation. Lastly, with respect to the third thing that was assumed, we answer, that liberty of will, and grace which operates irresistibly, seem contradictory in terms. The former supposes in itself a power to resist; the latter expressly denies it. To ward off such an inconsistency, the Author, in another place, gives us to understand, that God is not supposed by him, directly and immediately to compel the will, but to represent *to the mind, and the sensitive soul, declarations and ideas so powerful and strong, as shall infallibly move the rational soul to what is right*; or, as he had expressed it just before, *shall infallibly produce a good act of the will in an human soul, without depriving it of the use of liberty*: the intended conclusion from all which is, that the influence of the like grace might, without infringing on liberty, have excluded at first, and in the same

dæ, nec sine majori miraculo mutandæ. King, de origine mali, cap. v. §. 5. Sub. i. 3. Par. ii.

PAULICIANS, lett. K. M.

manner ever after exclude, moral evil from entering into the world. In this argument, we see the author set out with a position just and true, if not carried to those extravagant lengths to which he would extend it. God's grace (we say, as well as he, and the divines he refers to) suggests ideas to weaken the impression^u of the tempting object, and excites others, as the case is, either in confirming a weak faith, where that weakness proceeds not from stubbornness and an evil heart, by bringing in our way occasions and means to perceive the truths of the gospel, and the reasonableness of them; or, in matters of practice, where the Spirit is willing, though the flesh is weak, by calling up to our memory the obligation to our duty, the comforts, the encouragements, and the mighty rewards of performing it; all which may be well illustrated, if I may compare so great things with small (which, in our present state, the want of clearer ideas obliges us to do), by a friend exhorting and pleading with his friend^w, where the privilege of the will is undoubtedly preserved inviolate, and the event left to the integrity and determination of the

^u PAULICIANS, lett. K. M.

^w See Mr. Wollaston, in religion of nature, &c. p. 105, where he very strongly illustrates the case of these impressions, and their consistence with free-agency, by one man's altering the opinion of another, from the putting a book in his way, proper for that purpose.

man himself. I would by no means be understood in any thing I have said here, to set human remonstrances and encouragements upon a parallel with the aids and comforts of the Holy Ghost. Not only the sanctification of our natures in the regeneration by baptism, but his gracious influences for the continuing it through the course of our Christian warfare, and the renewing us upon repentance after any breaches made upon it, are all his work, and incomparably above any human assistances; so that scripture considers it, in one place, as nothing less than resurrection from a death in trespasses and sins¹; in another it describes it by the strong figure of a new creation²; and literally, not only by an enabling power to do well, but even by aiding our weakness and dulness in the willing it³. And yet, the same scripture that assures us of all this, assures us likewise, that these powers are so exerted in us before, and in, and after our conversion, that all along it is still within our own liberty and option, to put a bar to the efficacy of them, and hinder our salvation, either in the beginning or the progress of it⁴. And it is from the certainty of this

¹ Eph. ii. 1. ² Ditto ii. 10. ³ Philip. ii. 13.

⁴ Various are the ways by which this may be done. Our Saviour, in the parable of the sower, (Matt. xiii) points out the following: Carelessness and indifference to the offers of grace, by which means it never takes any

this truth, that we are enabled to discover one great reason, and the wisdom of it, why the operations of the Holy Spirit upon us are ordinarily only mediate, not by any such distinct and direct notices or marks, that we may be assured it is a divine agency, and nothing else; but are conveyed to us in a moral way, as is explained above, and in such a manner, that we cannot certainly distinguish it from the workings of our own minds. For such a dispensation is perfectly suited to the security of human liberty. In this way, our virtue hath both a sufficient trial, and sufficient assistance; so that we may conclude, it was for this end that the wisdom of God appointed it. All this I take to be conformable to the sense of sober divines, concerning what is generally called grace, and consonant too to what must be the test of every man's opinion upon it, the Holy Scriptures. But Bayle, on the other side, under a specious colour, as if the delectation he speaks of, and suggested ideas, were but moral motives, yet by annexing to them an effect certain and infallible, makes his argument turn out a mere fallacy; for these moral motives are necessarily supposed in it to

root at all; an unsettled turn and inconstancy under any temptation or tryal, so that what was at first attended to, and promised well, becomes neglected, and bears no fruit to perfection; fondness for the world, its pleasures and interests; and relaxing our guard against the seduction and wiles of Satan,

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be carried on so far, as, to all intents and purposes, changes their nature. The rule of applying them to answer his purpose, must ever be, to have them repeated and pressed, till at length the will shall yield; for if they once fail of that effect, all is ruined; evils enter, and

“*_____ velut agmine facto,
Quà data porta ruunt*” *VIRG.*

Upon all occasions therefore, whenever any man is inclined to abuse his free-will, special grace must attend his caprice, or folly, or naughtiness, and indart such suggestions, or paint such images on his mind^b, as shall infallibly prevent his going wrong. And in such case, what can we say is left to the choice of a bad man, where, of what kind soever the motives offered are, they must have no other bounds of time, or degree, but their success? The more the will is reluctant and stubborn, the longer they are to be repeated, and still the more and more weight is necessary to be thrown into the scale against it, till it shall be infallibly overborn. Such a degree of assistance as this, must be a measure no less inconsistent with a free nature, and a state of probation, than an actual restraint laid upon the will^c; and though I say not that it is a direct

^bSee BAYLE'S Dictionary, ditto.

^cDr. Nichols, speaking of the fall, scruples not to pronounce it in effect the same: “For God to have given Adam

rect physical necessity, yet the will here is plainly limited to one side; it is not permitted to make any choice at all, till it goes over to that side, and he that can see no repugnancy in this to free-agency, may digest any thing:

“ Nil intrà est oleâ, nil extrà est in nuce duri.” HOR.

Whereas, in the other account, the whole is consistent, the ends of grace are answered, and all inconveniences avoided; the weakness and waverings of our will are aided, it is enabled to make a wise choice, and yet its liberty, which constitutes the virtue and happiness of making it, is secured; the grace of God is not stinted, for he does what, in the case, is wise, and fit, and good; nor is his power limited, for the question is not concerning the power of God in an absolute sense (for God exercises no such power), but of his power guided by holiness, wisdom, and goodness; in a word, that method points out to us two rules, than which there can be none

Adam and Eve such powerful influxes of his spirit, as to have made it impossible for them to sin, would have been in effect to alter their natures, and to have changed them from free to necessary agents. Conference with a Theist, p. i. p. 206. — All that we can suppose reasonable for God to do, is to dispense to them such abundantly sufficient measures of his grace, as might enable them to encounter with the strongest temptation, but yet in such a way, as might be consistent with their reason and free-will.

either

either more necessary or safer, or surer on the subject of grace; to wit, that God never forces it where there is not a good disposition to receive it; nor denies it, or totally withdraws it, where there is not a bad turn of heart, and strong disposition to reject it. And if this account be best suited to all our ideas of the nature and attributes of God, who is essentially Holy; and just, and good; if it is most agreeable to our own nature, as we are reasonable creatures; if it be consonant to the revelations made to us in the holy scriptures (all which we have shewn it to be); then God's method in conferring grace, is directly contrary to what it was brought to prove; instead of being any evidence, that it might properly be applied to interpose, and infallibly stop men, before they break out into rebellious acts; it shews, that in many, the corruption of their hearts makes them no longer proper objects for it to work upon, and so to be incapable of the uses and benefits of it. If I am thought to have been more particular on the article of grace, than was needful; merely to refute Bayle's position, I acknowledge it to be so; and yet, under the excesses of the age we live in, and that overflowing contempt of an essential doctrine of Christianity, from one kind of men, who deny all influence and operations of the spirit on our minds; as well as the wild exaggerations of grace, to the purposes of enthusiasm,

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from another : I would beg leave in the conclusion to observe, the infinite importance of a full persuasion of, and due attention to, two great truths which we have argued from, and which have all the sanction and authority that scripture can give to any truth ; I mean the reality of the aids of the Spirit, and the no less certainty of the freedom of our wills, under them. The first will teach us a just reverence for this holy monitor, and a due care to preserve his temple, the temple of our bodies; pure, and not displeasing to him. It will convince us of the infinite danger of slighting his gifts and graces, so necessary in our present feeble state, and induce us therefore to desire and be instant in prayer for them, upon all emergencies of trials and temptations : It will encourage us to keep our wills disenslaved from the world, it's interests and pleasures, that we may not be deaf to his checks and admonitions, nor stifle the sense of virtue and duty called up in us. The second great truth excludes all absolute assurance, unless we will be so absurd as to say, our own will is impeccable : It therefore carries with it a strong warning to be modest and humble ; a warning ever the more necessary, the less a man imagines he needs it. For he that thinketh he standeth, or (*ὁ δοκῶν*, that seemeth to stand), is still to take heed lest he fall ; and if he does this, he will not fail to extend his care to the blessed suggestions of
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the Spirit, that he may cherish and produce fruit from them; and be no less careful and well grounded in what he permits to pass with him for heavenly impulses; for as we see they are not given in such measure but that we may overbear them, so our own feelings and experience may convince us, that the method in which they are conveyed is such, that, without caution and discretion, we may mistake them. If we may fall, notwithstanding the real and true impulses of that Blessed Spirit upon us, how surely must we do so, when we suffer ourselves to be led away by the warm imagination of our own fancies and follies, and the devices of Satan, which we vainly take up as the sober and sacred suggestions of heaven? of which sad delusion there have been many instances in the world. A just sense therefore, that under a state of grace, we are still left to the determination of our own wills, are still fallible, and may, in the multitude of thoughts which rise up in our hearts, not be able to distinguish what source or cause they sprung from, cannot but lead a wise and good man to try the spirits, not only what kind of spirit that is, by which others may assume to be directed; but above all, what that is which we take for the spirit within ourselves; for our rule to do this by, we have the same scriptures on which the certainty of our own power of quenching the spirit, and abusing of or mistaking its gifts

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and graces, are founded; there we are told, what the genuine fruits of the spirit are, such as we may depend upon, and can depend on nothing else; and if temperance, patience, godliness, brotherly kindness, and the like, are dictated within us, then let us listen to them as the voice of the Spirit: But if the ideas excited are high conceit of ourselves, and contempt of others; if worldly views and interests, though under the cover of religion; if hatred, variance, emulation; if gratifications of our spleen, or pride, or faction; these are the fruits of another spirit, they are sensual, carnal, devilish. As to thoughts, or strong imaginations rising in us, of no moral nature, in themselves indifferent, and sometimes of little or no significance at all, which yet men, that are fond of supposing themselves favourites of heaven, and under the influence of an extraordinary providence, will needs ascribe to a superior agency: the pretence is ridiculous in itself, introducing an extraordinary providence for mere ordinary occasions; and cannot fail of exposing both the man and his religion to contempt. A good and prudent man will be content, under God's blessing, to acquiesce in the use of honest means, and the rational exercise of his own faculties, without pretences to warnings or impulses, which God has neither given us warrant to expect, nor rule to explain. If he has any wise and gracious ends to effect, he

can with infinite ease do it, by the instrumentality of second causes, whilst ourselves neither discover the hand that guides them, nor know the end for which it works; and though nothing is surer, than that the great governor of the world does sometimes, in the course of providence (I speak not here of miraculous and sensible effects, wrought as credentials to some great message to man) interpose, yet nothing is more difficult, than for ourselves to say, with any precision or certainty, when or where it is really so. Our business is to receive the blessings of life as coming from him, with love and gratitude; his afflictions too, as from the same all-wise author, with submission and obedience; and to acknowledge upon the whole with reverence, that his way is in the sea, and his paths in the great waters, and his footsteps are not known.

The glory of God had been often called in to answer objections on this subject; the difficulties and hardships that appeared in the more rigid systems of some divines, from absolute decrees, and their doctrines concerning election and reprobation, were attempted to be resolved by saying, the majesty and honour of God required it; that it shewed his unlimited power, and entire independance; for it would, in their way of thinking, be a lessening to God to stand obliged by any laws to his creatures. Here was room for the strongest

strongest censure, and Bayle has expressed a just indignation upon it. Yet not without driving to his point, by leading unwary readers from such men's absurd reasonings to his great conclusion, the incompetence of reason to argue and judge concerning the origin of evil; which is really the same thing, as to direct us to an hospital of distracted people to judge of the extent of human understanding. Had he argued here candidly and impartially, he would have shewed the grounds of their mistake, and what the glory of God is, for which *he* acts, and we must in duty ever act. But this would have been beside his mark, which was to bring to view, not the strength, but the weakness of human reason. I shall however take this occasion of inquiring into the purport of what we are told in scripture concerning God's acting for his own glory, as it has been much insulted by our enemies, and perhaps not always asserted to it's full and adequate sense by friends. A Manichean's principles lead him to tell us, that if there were, as we maintain, but one principle, viz. an infinitely good and gracious God, his glory could weigh but little with him in the eye of reason and goodness, when the keeping of misery out of the world, was the point under consideration (meaning, that he should have done this at all events); others have advanced further, and turn to scoff what scripture says of God's making all things for his own glory; as if in this

this representation, the Deity received an addition to his happiness by our praises; or himself acted under the same vanity as ourselves; it is indeed their estimating glory by the foibles of men, that makes them talk at this rate. We see too often men's judgments of the glory of earthly monarchs, founded upon the greatness of their riches, the extent of their conquests, their state and magnificence, and a power unlimited and uncontrouled. But this is far short of the true notion of Divine glory: infinite power, universal dominion, and supreme majesty, constitute it but in part; justice, and goodness, and wisdom, and all these infinite too, are necessary to compleat it's idea; it becomes therefore impossible that it should redound to God's honour, to exert one in contradiction to another, because, his glory being founded upon all, whatever is inconsistent with any one must diminish his glory, and be so far a dishonour to him. In this view we see what is meant by the glory of God, and may more safely determine how we are to understand the great scripture truth, that God made all things for his glory; most certainly not in the absurd sense of making them for a shew only of his infinite greatness, and devoting some men to inevitable misery by the might of his power, and (if I may use here the words of the vain Nebuchadnezzar), "for the honour of his majesty," (Dan. iv.) for whatever power or greatness there might

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be in this, it stands in full contradiction to his goodness. It must therefore be a glory founded, not on a single perfection, abstractedly from all the rest, but in the evidence and harmony of his attributes. A thing is said, in scripture, to be done for such or such an end or purpose, either when that end or purpose was directly the cause why the thing was done, or when the doing it did eventually fulfil or accomplish somewhat, that in the aim and intent of Providence had been predictive, or figurative and significative of it. Of this latter sense we have examples in some events, which are said to come to pass, that what the prophets had predicted, might have it's accomplishment; thus, for instance, on Christ's being born of the Virgin Mary, the evangelist remarks, that "All this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoke by the prophet." Yet, as commentators well observe, the bringing about this great event was, not for the sake, or for the end, of fulfilling a prophecy; but the prophecy was given for the sake of the event^d, which God, having pre-ordained it, was pleased to foretel for our conviction, that we might assuredly be-

^d Factum hoc, ut consummaretur, &c. non ita intelligi debet, quasi Deus Christum ex virgine nasci voluerit hoc propriè consilio, ut quod Esaias dixerat fieret; cum potius quia id Deus voluerit fieri, ideo & voluerit per Esaiam dici. Grot. in Matt. i. 22. near the end of his long note on that verse.

lieve the fruit of that birth was the Messiah, that Emmanuel who should come and dwell with us. And if such an interpretation is proper in so high an instance as this, where a miraculous power and interposition was necessary, much more may it take place in lower cases, where no such extraordinary agency need be supposed in the event; for it would certainly be an unnecessary multiplying of miracles, and therefore absurd, to assert every event so spoke of, to be brought about by a supernatural agency, that the prophecy which had foretold it might be fulfilled. The purport therefore of these expressions, "that it might be fulfilled," or, "all this was done that it might be fulfilled," may be considered as equivalent to saying, By this means was fulfilled what was spoke by the prophets, or, as St. Matthew himself expresses it, Then was fulfilled what was spoke by the prophet. To

It is necessary above all to admit this rule, when the action spoken of is of a wicked and immoral nature; thus, for instance, we cannot suppose either Herod was impelled by any overpowering agency, to destroy the infants, or that the son of perdition was lost, to fulfil the prophecy. I would by no means be understood as intending hereby a mere *accommodation*, which I know not how to look upon as other than a violence to the language of scripture, and a dishonour to prophecy. But in this way, the event being foreseen by God, and in its due time exactly corresponding to the prediction, it turns out to

apply this to the case before us: We may certainly say, in the like sense, that God made the world for his glory; it was eventually or consequentially so; it redounded to his honour, and displayed the immensity of his power and goodness. But we may proceed further; and as in the prophecies God had the events that were to accomplish them in his view and aim, so it is no less certain that the world was made intentionally also for the glory of God. Like a wise master-builder, he made it a work worthy of himself; he shewed in it all due regard to his own majesty, and the infinite perfections of his nature; and had he done otherwise, he had made it unsuitable to his wisdom, or unworthy of his power. These are then two points clear and certain; God made the world such as to be for his glory; and he *aimed* and *intended* that it should be so.—But there are good men, who are not willing we should stop here; but think it necessary to say God is strictly the final cause of all, and the manifesting his glory, the end of his works. There are even enemies, who

the credit and evidence of prophecy, and is an attestation to the truth of what is to be confirmed thereby, no less by coming to pass in the ordinary course, than if it had been effected in a supernatural way; for it has from the divine prediction the seal of God's omniscience to it, and the foretelling of it was as much beyond the powers of nature as any other miracle.

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insist upon this as the language and sense of scripture, but with a perverse view of taking advantage and abusing scripture for it. And it must be further remembered, that the rule of interpretation, which I have above given, only takes place, where the nature and reason of the thing, or the plain intent of the author, requires it; whether either of these make such a sense necessary, will fall under consideration in the course of the subject. It is acknowledged, that, notwithstanding a just regard was had to the glory of God in the creation, yet whether this was his end, or only the means to bring about another end, is a different matter; for that there was another end will appear beyond doubt from a due attention to what God's glory consists in; for this being a manifestation of his perfections, viz. his infinite power, wisdom, and goodness, and the harmony of them, it appears from hence impossible it should be his own glory, exclusive of the benefit of his creatures, for that would be a contradiction to his goodness. The demonstration therefore, and communication of his goodness, cannot but have been one end why God made the world. The great remaining question is, whether such goodness was his sole end and motive, exclusive of his own glory as such; a question of no small moment in religion, as we shall shew in the sequel, and which will also re-

quire the more caution in respect to the great authorities we may dissent from^f. I shall only propose a few reasons, that seem to conclude God's glory was another end or motive to him, and leave them with the judgment of the

^f Archbishop King has expressed himself thus upon the case: *Novi communiter dici mundum conditum esse ad gloriam Dei, sed hoc ἀνθρωποπαθὺς*; eodem enim modo cupido gloriæ tribuitur Deo, quo ira, &c. Cum igitur scriptura nos docet, mundum ad gloriam Dei creatum fuisse, intelligendum est quòd attributa divina, scilicet potentia, bonitas, & sapientia, tam clarè elucescunt in operibus ejus, ac si nihil in animo eo condendo habuisset præter ostentationem horum, nec potuissent ei fini aptius intervenire, si ad gloriam Dei destinata fuissent. Orig. Mal. cap. i. § 3. par. x. His learned commentator goes into the same notion, and asserts, the goodness and happiness of God's rational creatures, to be his end in the creation; and his glory the means only of bringing about that end. His words are (page 426) "The good, or rather goodness, of the creature" (and it's happiness he always supposes included in this it's goodness) "is properly the ultimate end of all the dispensations of God, and not his own glory, any further than it is the means to it. His glory seems to be displayed no otherwise, than as it is subservient and necessary to this end." It is indeed a certain truth, that the goodness and felicity of his reasonable creatures, was one end to God for creating them; and it is certain also, that his glory, manifested in this his creation, is a means of promoting the virtue and happiness of those his creatures; and yet it follows not from hence, that his glory was no otherwise intended, than as the means, and not as the end also. Upon what motives I go into the contrary opinion, will be seen in the text,

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reader. In the first place then, it must be acknowledged, that God, in acting, though it were for his own glory, still acted in conformity to the strictest justice and truth; in purposing to shew his nature to be incomparably glorious, he but purposed to shew it what it is; and in all this, he proceeded not only on truth, but on truth in the highest degree worthy and fit in itself to be known, and capable of redounding to the mighty felicity of those to whom it was revealed; and therefore both of these (though his own glory first in the order of nature) were just and wise motives to God for calling his creation into being. What is in the nature of it an everlasting rectitude could not be an end unfit for God to propose to himself. Now glory, or praise, and thanksgiving to him from his works, is an everlasting rectitude: if it was ever immutably fit he should be glorified in and by his creatures, it could not be unfit that he should regard a thing so highly meet and just, as a motive in the production of those his creatures. Once again, view the argument in another light; it is suitable to the nature of things, that creatures endued with reason, and invested with the means of happiness, should on their part pay glory and honour, and obedience to God; it is suitable to the same relation, that the Creator receive, or accept on his part, the due performance of that obedience, honour and glory; and therefore when

God made it a motive to himself, he did it upon eternal rectitude, and that perfection of his own nature, which is the pattern of all other rectitude and fitness. Suitably to all which, we find God as peremptorily declaring, as ever he did any other thing, that he will not give his glory to another; which declaration was made, upon the foundation of eternal rectitude and justice; his glory, that is, the glory and service due to him, as their maker, being in the highest degree fit to be paid to him, and in the highest degree unfit to be paid to any other. But does not all this suppose God's glory may receive addition or improvement from his creation, although, being ever infinite, it is, in the nature of the thing, incapable either of augmentation or diminution? Of the absolute glory of God's essence this is undoubtedly true; it cannot, as the school-men speak, *recipere magis aut minus*; but his relative glory from the manifestation of his attributes may be greater or less, according to the degree of such manifestation, and the returns of duty, adoration, and thanksgiving; and his holiness and goodness may approve, and take complacency in our discharge of them, without supposing his absolute glory or happiness, different, or greater from them, at one period than another. If we think otherwise, it is because we calculate from ourselves, who are subject to time and change; but to God every thing

is in complete view, as if present, from eternity to eternity; and this takes away all absolute difference as to him; he even sees the rectitude of all his dispensations; has ever before him the happy effects of them, and ever approves and takes complacency in them, without any variableness, or shadow of change or alteration. If there be weight in this reasoning, and God might make the world, in a proper and strict sense, for his own glory, consistently with truth, nature, and rectitude, and without derogating from his own purity and perfection, then this debate assumes a very different aspect; there is no longer occasion to recur to mere figures, in what scripture says on this subject, as if it spoke here, *pro modulo humano*; as it does where parts or passions, proper only to created beings, such as hands, or eyes, or grief, or repentance, are ascribed to him: but we are left to the plain and obvious sense of scripture language, and we may admit the expressions to resume their own strength, without bending them to borrowed meanings; for we are directly led to assign the glory of God, as a wise and worthy motive to him in his creation; and neither necessity, nor ornament, nor the intent of the writer, require a figurative or remote meaning; and in such case it is a rule, which common sense directs, to adhere to the literal; and the disregard of any such rule must bring uncertainty and confusion into all

all language. This his glory, as a final cause, is so often repeated, and in terms so precise and full, as seem intended to preclude all evasion. All things are declared to have been made, not only of him, and through him, but *eis autem*, as the end of all, to him, or for him^e. The shewing forth this glory of God, is made the mark and aim, the beginning and end, of all our actions; "whatever ye do, do all for the glory of God." The very form prescribed by the Holy Spirit of God, for our hymns on earth, the form of the immortal songs in heaven, indicate glory to God, not only as a debt due to him as our Creator, but as one end of our creation. "Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive honour, and glory, and power; for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure" (*ὅτι τὸ θέλημα σου*, for thy will, which was thus pleased to shew thy sovereignty and glory, and to manifest thy goodness to ourselves) "they are and were created." (Rev. iv. 11.) The great inducement for confining passages, so full and express as these, to a figurative sense, arises (I doubt not) from a desire to exclude every thing out of the idea of God, that carries any resemblance to ostentation or caprice, to a vain thirst after praise, or a fondness for somewhat that but falsely passes for true glory. Such blemishes are indeed too apt to intrude and tarnish any motives of our own

from *Rom. xii. 36. 1 Cor. vi. 8.*

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from honour and glory; and yet, even as to ourselves, when the dignity of a man's own nature, rank, and station, in conjunction with integrity, the love of man, and the love of God, with gratitude and obedience to him, the father and fountain of all, is a man's end and aim in what he does, this itself is rectitude, and adds grace and lustre to his other virtues. It is not therefore making glory one aim or end of acting, that argues folly or weakness in the agent; it is a vicious or faulty glory that does it: Now God, purposing his own glory, connected at the same time with undeviating goodness, this precludes all imputation either of levity or error, and of impotence too; for himself wants not glory, has no disturbances to guard against, needs no comforts wherewith to balance other inconveniences or oppressions, as is the case of many deserving men, nor is obliged to court fame and figure, which he cannot command. There is indeed one likeness, and to this a wise and good man ever pays his best regards; the honour and reputation of such a one awakens the attention of a giddy world, and gives weight to his example and precepts; this bears some distant analogy to the wisdom of the divine measures, since God turns the manifestation of his power, and holiness, and glory, into a means of stirring up the hearts of men to reverence and obey him: But the best of men, after all, have too many weaknesses and infirmities

infirmities to assume glory to themselves. Their excellence is mixed; it is derived: *What hast thou that thou didst not receive* ^{h p} But God's glory and perfection is in and of himself; in his own attributes, or from his own operations; and therefore in him to claim it, was a debt (if I may speak as men speak) to his own nature, as to pay it is a duty from all others. On the same rectitude and propriety that God chose to display his glory, on the same he indispensably bound his reasonable creatures to acknowledge and give him the honour of it. In the nature of things it is due to him from them, and therefore as a thing wise, and reasonable, and just, he requires it of them; and all this is so suited to our natural ideas, that it is amazing it should not have given some check to their intemperate boldness, who turn to jest and scorn what scripture says of it, and even our own acting for it. And yet there is still a more special tie and engagement upon them (how lightly soever they may think of it), which is, the most bounden gratitude, that ought to restrain them. It was, as we have seen, the effect of wisdom in God, it was meetness and rectitude, to intend the manifestation of his power and glory: But this is not all; his doing it was also goodness; nay, it was love and tenderness, and preventing mercy to us all. By

1 Cor. iv.

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this display of his power and glory, his creatures capable of moral agency are taught to think worthily of him, to fear, and honour him with all dutiful observance, are induced to imitate his imitable perfections, and fall down with humble adoration of such as are beyond any created sphere, on all which their felicity depends.—In the close of this long article, in which, as we have seen, I have not the happiness entirely to concur with some very eminent persons, it seems necessary for me to strengthen what I have advanced, with the authority of one of the most learned and judicious of our divines¹; and it may not be unnecessary to point out also the reasons and uses, that induced me to enter into such an inquiry. In the first place then, the manner in which scripture speaks of this matter, had no small weight with me: The gentlemen on the other side of the question will acknowledge, the part we have taken gives the

¹ “ Though the Universal Cause made all things for the benefit of some creatures framed by him, yet hath he made them ultimately for himself; and God is as universally the final, as the efficient cause of his operations. The apostle hath taught us, that not only of him and by him, as the first author, but also to him and for him, as the ultimate end, are all things.” —
“ Thus God rejoiceth at the effects of his wisdom, power, and goodness, and taketh delight in the works of his hands. Thus doth he order and dispose of all things unto his own glory, which redoundeth from the demonstration of his attributes.” Pearson on the Creed, under the words, THE FATHER ALMIGHTY.

justest interpretation, if nature and the reason of the thing would admit of it. This I believe they do, and have shewn the grounds upon which I think so; if they are just, it is but paying due honour to scripture, to give it it's own sense, and especially as it respects so high a subject as the glory of God, and the ends for which he made us.—Secondly, I considered it as the fullest and most direct refutation of scoffers, and our common enemies, who insult over Christianity and its scriptures, on account of the stress there laid on the glory of God; but whether prejudice, and propensity to find fault with what they do not like, leads them to do this, or really believing the scripture-expressions to be too strong and precise, to be resolved into a figurative and qualified meaning, they yet know not how to conceive the divine being acting for his own glory, or from any other end or motive than mere goodness; in either case, to shew the scripture to be literally true, and that it may be defended in the sense upon which they attack it, must, above all other methods, effectually refute the mistake or malevolence of such gain-sayers.—Thirdly, the sense we are pleading for, must have the most powerful effect to retain men in duty; if it appear, God shews that regard for his glory, as to make it a final cause in his works, how must this impress upon us the most awful idea of his being, and enforce our reverence of his majesty?

jeſty? And yet, when we conſider again, that this world was made for the theatre of his goodneſs alſo, how amiable the reflection! how needleſs muſt appear ſuch queſtions as this, which has been ſometimes bandied, whether, ſince whatever we do we are to do all for the glory of God, we are therefore to make this ſo our end, as to ſuperſede all views to our own happineſs? for our happineſs, we ſee, was not out of the view of God; it was one end to him, as his glory was another; and it becomes, in like manner, from his exemplar, our own undivided and indiſpenſable duty, ever to concur in theſe great aims, and through the courſe of our lives, and to the beſt of our abilities, to promote the glory of God, our own happineſs, and the happineſs of all about us.—We may be thought perhaps by this time, to have loſt ſight of Bayle; and yet the enquiry that has laſt engaged us, beſides it's own peculiar uſes, has a conſiderable effect on the main ſubject of the preſent treatiſe; has ſhewn the neceſſity of taking in reaſon in religious matters; and that, in many important caſes, reaſon itſelf muſt determine the ſenſe of ſcripture; particularly, it caſts light upon the capital queſtion, How came evil? for if God was, in and by his creation, to regard jointly, his own honour, and the trueſt happineſs of his reaſonable creatures, this accounts for his not interpoſing his own overpowering reſtraint to prevent all entrance
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of evil, because neither his glory, nor our happiness, could be suitably provided for without the grant of free-will; and yet free-will, in the nature of the thing, inferred in us a power of sinning, or introducing moral evil, and the consequence of it, punishment, or natural evil. But to proceed with the remainder of Bayle's reasonings; he has laboured, with no small pains and pomp, what I cannot so much call another argument, as a disingenuous piece of artifice in management, affecting to introduce, at every turn, the mystery of the Trinity, and expatiating on the absurdity of trying it by reason^k. From all which we are left to infer that God's suffering evil to come into the world, is a parallel to the other, and as much an inexplicable mystery as it. But there is too wide a difference in the cases to argue from one to the other. The doctrine of the Trinity relates strictly to the recondite nature and essence of the Deity; no principles of our own nature, no power of reason, could discover either (as the Logicians speak) the *essence* or *duration* of it, either the thing or its cause, or have the least conception of any such matter, before God's telling us; or afterwards, any more of it than he has told us. Yet even here reason demands some place; it enquires whether the

^k This is most particularly insisted upon by him, in his explanation at the end of the Dictionary.

doctrine is contradictory to our faculties; for God, who gave us those faculties, cannot propose for their belief, revelations contradictory to them; any such contradiction would overturn all just claim of the revelation itself; it enquired likewise into the authenticity of the revelation, and whether the doctrine in question is part of it; and if, in these points, the evidence is full in favour of the doctrine, the line of reason can go no further. Difficulties and objections, from the mysteriousness of the thing, are foreign to the purpose; from the nature of it, which transcends all we see or know, the revelation itself is our rule, and nothing else can be. But with regard to the question on the origin of evil, reason stands upon ground more level to it's capacities; the subject-matter of the debate is sufficiently within it's idea and apprehension; it has principles to argue upon, and mediums to draw conclusions from: It will insist, and irrefragably prove too, as plain as it can prove any thing, that the world must have been made by an almighty intelligent Being, or God; it too sensibly knows what moral and what physical evils are; it sees, in a thousand instances, that man's free-will brings moral evil upon himself; it can, by the fairest reasons, account for the entrance of physical evil from it. Even the moral attributes of God, his holiness, justice, goodness, wisdom, are so far within the reach of human reason, that

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it can prove the absolute certainty of them. But if by the light of reason they are certain truths, then we may most assuredly deduce from those lights, that God could not be the author of evil, though man himself might. So far reason, under it's improved lights, can fairly go; the particular manner, or special fact, by which evil gained it's entrance, is another point, is strictly historical, not matter of reason; and so can be known only by authentic history, such as in this case the scripture account only is. If what we have above attributed to reason, was less understood in the times of heathenism, yet it is reason still, it is not (if I may so speak) sunk in revelation; Christianity has not absolutely discovered many truths, but opened the reasons of others, and thrown such lights upon them, that our understanding receives a new clearness and enlargement from them; and reason, when the way is thus opened, may prove several things upon it's own principles, which it could not at all, at best not near so easily and perfectly, do before. And of the truth of this I apprehend the origin of evil to be itself an eminent instance.

But we have not yet reached the full extent of Bayle's argument; it is, we have seen, a two-edged weapon. If one side fails, he attacks with the other; so that in case God could not prevent the abuse of free-will, then reason is to insist, he either ought not to have made

made man a free-agent at all, or to have withdrawn the gift before it was abused: By intending to misapply it, they will own he has forfeited all right to it; God stands not bound to give him the reward of a faithful use of it; yet he is still his creature; and can, they say, infinite goodness and mercy deliver him over to misery, or suffer him to make his being a curse to him? this is the last resource of all bad men! let reason plead it's own cause. Bayle argues as follows¹: "God, by making man the head of his creation, here shewed his peculiar love and regard for him; but we cannot conceive how a gracious and bountiful Creator can make a considerable present to one he loves, without designing to increase his happiness." Very true, God did all this; he gave man free-will for the perfection of his nature, and the increase of his happiness; he could hardly, if at all, have been a rational creature without it, or enjoyed more than a sensitive happiness. He has enabled him with power to use it well, and guarded him with motives within and without to do it. "But where it would be abused to the man's ruin, there to revoke it before this is done, is the only way to keep the quality of patron or benefactor; the same goodness that induced him to bestow it, to make

¹ See PAULICIANS, lett. K. Δ. Δ.

man happy, will induce him to withdraw it before it has taken a contrary turn, and made him miserable^m." With better reason we may, I presume, reply, this is stating the matter very imperfectly and partially. It overlooks the extreme difference of circumstances, when man came innocent out of his Maker's hands, and the same man about to abuse the Divine goodness, and intentionally a rebel. The demand in the argument is the same, as to claim a kindness for this reason, because the man had renounced, or was preparing to renounce, all right to it. It was inconsistent with order, and rectitude, and fitness, to do such a man a favour, that could not at all contribute to mend and make him better; and such the taking away his freedom must be; it could effect no moral change in him; it was a demand upon God, unsuited to his all-perfect nature. The man's tergiversation had rendered him utterly displeasing to the Divine holiness, and nothing but the renovation of his nature could make him otherwiseⁿ. And this shews the

^m See PAULICIANS, lett. K. Δ. Δ.

ⁿ Abp. King has a passage to this purpose, that has so much strength and judgment in it, that the reader will forgive my transcribing it. "When a free-agent is ready to make an ill choice, and would do it, if not prevented by an almighty power, he is already guilty in the sight of God; such a readiness is an obliquity in his will, and is a moral evil, and therefore God is not obliged

the inestimable mercy and wisdom of the redemption, that could deliver us after our fall; not by uncreating us, whom God had created immortal; not by reversing nature, and withdrawing our faculties, but by repairing our broken powers, and recovering our primæval innocence, the only way that it was either worthy of God to do it in, or could possibly fit us for his favour.

But Bayle suffers not his Manichean to quit his hold; he supports the cause not with reason only but with facts; he heaps example upon example, and yet if you answer one, you answer all: The instance he has produced

“ obliged to prevent the execution of it; for that were
“ to prevent the punishment, though the guilt be con-
“ tracted; and it is easy to see what the consequence
“ of such a procedure may be in a world that is to be
“ governed by rewards and punishments, and what ef-
“ fect it might have on those innumerable myriads of
“ intelligent beings, that are under the government of
“ God, and that are all now virtuous by their choice,
“ and thereby justly distinguished in their rewards and
“ circumstances, and possess of that most valuable per-
“ fection, and only moral good, an active conformity to
“ the will of God. Whereas, if the will of man were
“ necessitated, and held by an irresistible force from
“ chusing amiss; the whole intellectual creation would be
“ let loose, and under no kind of moral obligation to
“ concern themselves about their choices; and so there
“ could only be a passive conformity to God's will, and
“ no room for virtue or holiness, which are the most va-
“ luable goods in the world; and hence to avoid some
“ moral evil, there would be no room for any moral
“ good.” See note lett. x. par. iv. p. 362.

oftenest, and laboured most, is that of wise and good parents, who ever keep the children they love from dangerous experiments; and would be thought cruel if they did not remove, to the utmost of their power, every temptation which they know would hazard their happiness°. The instance is popular and taking, but in the latitude in which it is applied to God in the matter before us, is not reason but the abuse of it. There is infinite disparity in the two cases, and no one would be more ready than Bayle, on any other occasion, to push his adversary with the rule, *Disparium dispar est ratio*. There are many reasons that might shew us the difference; I shall content myself with producing one, which, I apprehend, totally overturns all the force of the example. The restraints that parents lay on their children, neither do, nor can rob them of free-will; this noble privilege is still unhurt; the external act is restrained, but the will is inviolate, and capable all the while of exerting itself into

° See Art. MANICHEANS, lett. D. Origen, lett. E. and especially PAULICIANS, lett. E. towards the end of that long note, and in other places. One would almost think, from such frequent repetitions, that the author imagined there was some peculiar strength and weight in the instance; yet Bayle's sense could not possibly be deceived by it. It was however peculiarly fitted to work upon the passions of men, and gave him a notable opportunity of declaiming upon it: And this, as in some other instances, prevailed against his better understanding.

virtuous acts, or the contrary. But for God to remove from man every possibility of sinning, to deny him every gift he might make an ill use of, is, as we have shewn, to reduce him to a mere necessary agent, incapable of the only thing that could fit him for rational happiness. There is no concluding therefore, from what is the conduct of earthly parents, to what is, or ought to be, the rule to the great Parent of the world, further than in general, from love in them to love in God; and this benevolent affection is, in degree, incomparably greater in God, and surer, and perfecter, than in the best of earthly parents; but as to the ways and methods of executing it, or bringing it into act, these may widely differ; man may mistake, but God cannot; man's views are short and narrow; God's wisdom and care concerned and acting for the universe of beings; jointly for the good of the whole, and that of individuals; under special and proper limitations therefore only the comparison may be made; and I may venture to say, that the conduct of wise and good parents, if justly considered, and as right reason would ground it, is so far from countenancing any such conclusion as is supposed, that all the weight of it lies the other way: Thus, let us say, a wise and good parent takes all just and prudent measures to secure the happiness of his child; and we may be permitted to draw the conclusion, that the

fountain of all goodness, the great parent of us all, will assuredly do the same to ourselves. So far the analogy is just, and the consequence indisputable; but at the same time it is no less evident to our reason, that no good and wise parent ought to or will interpose, or violently prevent the hurt, or even the loss of the child he loves (though in his power to do it) if greater mischief would follow therefrom. Now this is the very case in the question before us. By such a conduct as these men are pleased to prescribe to God, he must destroy the foundations of morality, and go contrary to his own nature and attributes. But to conclude this treatise with what gave the strongest occasion to it: Has all the parade of argument in Bayle, repeated *usque ad fastidium*, so much weight that we need give up the field of reason, to the chicanery of either ancient Manicheism, or modern scepticism? I trust we need not; and then, I am sure, we ought not. God expects us to glorify him with all our powers, in matters which are the peculiar objects of faith, with humble and steadfast belief suited to the divine evidence on which they stand; and in such as are the objects of knowledge, with the exertion, on all proper occasions, of our rational abilities in the support and defence of them. In such case therefore, as this before us, where the very being of religion, natural as well as revealed, is concerned, and so must, in some measure, come within

within the reach of our natural faculties, in such case, I say, to desert the post of reason, as utterly indefensible, and appeal only to the written word, what greater triumph than this can we afford to men who pay no regard to scripture, and rest their cause upon the irreconcilableness of the matter in question, to the reason of man, and the common principles of his nature? give up this to them, and you give them all they ask.

“Hoc Ithacus velit, & magno mercentur Atridae.” VIRG.

We may fairly put the question, would the folly or treachery of such conduct be greater? When the power or wisdom, or goodness of Providence is impeached, and our own eternal interests too so immediately concerned, it is a duty we owe to God and religion, to unravel and lay open the fallacy of so foul a charge. It is a debt of charity, which we owe to our adversaries themselves, to remove, if it may be, their stumbling-block; and this will, at least with some men, most effectually be done, by joining issue with them before the jurisdiction they acknowledge, and refuting them upon their own principles; shewing them, from that reason to which they appeal, and by which only they will be determined, that we all enjoy light enough to see, if we please, God has not left himself without witness; that whether in our right use or abuse of this great and essential dispensation of his towards us, as accountable creatures,

tures, I mean his gift of free-will, still he is justified in this his *way*, and clear when he is judged^p. In the pursuit of sober reasoning here, we overturn no barrier, we confound not the provinces of reason and revelation; Scripture loses no weight from the disquisition; itself opens new lights to reason, that enable it to carry the force of it's powers, much farther than it was able to do in the darker ages of heathenism; and at the same time itself receives back both illustration of many of it's important doctrines, and attestation to the whole. God is shewn, in his dealings, to be one, uniform, and consistent; and true religion also, one grand, harmonious, and righteous system, though shining forth with different degrees of light and glory, in different periods of it; and in all the supreme Lawgiver and Judge of the world, suiting his demands to his gifts, and expecting no where to reap in greater measure, than proportionably to what he has sown.

^p There cannot be supposed to be meant by me in this debate, a knowledge more than sufficient for our present state; we must wait for a perfect comprehension of this important subject till another life.

A
R E V I E W, &c.

P A R T II.

WHAT we have considered hitherto hath been *Manicheism*, strictly such, under the conduct and patronage of it's ablest advocate. It hath since met with further refinements, which both renounce the name, and pare off the most glaring absurdities of the thing, and yet pursue the same point (to wit, the accounting for the *evil* in the world) from a restraint laid on the benevolent Creator, in the forming the system of the universe, and such check from his stubborn materials, as all his power was not able to surmount¹. And thus what the Manicheans attributed to an intelligent evil principle, is with more art and skill, at least with less face of insult, charged upon an intractability of dull insensate matter, and inherent evil in the nature of things. Yet it is by no means designed here to charge on the author, more than a similarity to

¹ Free inquiry into the nature and origin of evil, in six letters, printed in 1757.---But mem. this is the second edition.

Manicheism in some points, tho' these not inconsiderable either in themselves or in their tendency; and therefore I flatter myself, I may be permitted, notwithstanding the abhorrence he expresses of Manicheism, to point out what he seems not aware of, or not to pay a sufficient attention to, the near alliance betwixt his own doctrines, and some capital branches of that pestilent error, nor consequently of the large strides himself is taking towards it. The difference betwixt them lies in assigning the grounds or cause of that absolute and indispensable necessity of evil, which both agree in. The inquirer had too much sense to recur to the stale and palpable absurdity of two opposite, but eternal, independent, and equally powerful principles; and therefore supposes this necessity founded on the natural and invincible imperfection of all possible created beings; and yet, notwithstanding this difference, the likeness soon returns. In the Manichean scheme, the good principle was supposed obliged to compound the matter with the evil one, and take in what is bad in the world, that he might be permitted to ingraft his own proportionable share of good; so in this author's account, our benevolent Creator, by reason of the unsurmountable restraint he lay under from matter, had only this option left him, either to make the world with

Lett. i. p. 6.

the

the imperfections and miseries we see in it, or not to make it at all*. In the inquiry into the merits of such an assertion, it might seem the first question proper to be asked, whether the author supposes this intractable matter to have existed from all eternity, or to have been created by God for the purpose of his forming a world out of it; a question intimately connected with the great principle of his book, since the power of God over matter must be supposed more or less absolute, according as such matter is either supposed to have existed by a self-existence, and from eternity with him; or to have itself been created, and to owe it's very being to him. Those of the ancients, who, as our author hath here done, placed the origin of evil in the insuperable intractability of matter, were well aware of the weight of this question; for to attempt to acquit God of the origin of evil, and yet at the same time suppose him to have created such materials for his intended world, as contained in them the invincible principles of evil, seemed to them too great an absurdity, and to establish the thing they professed to disprove. They ventured not their cause therefore on any thing less than the eternity of matter†; nor did they here mistake their weapon; for admitting the thing, that matter was eternal, self-existent, with it's evil qua-

* P. 15. 48, 49.

† See the following pages.

lities or properties inherent in it (and this was the notion of almost all the philosophers), the way was then open to think that whatever evils were in the nature of matter (and themselves were daily witnesses what a luxuriant harvest of them there was), they must of necessity mix with the world, and be inseparable by all the powers of the Deity, they having been eternal no less than he, and their laws coeval with him; which, therefore, for God to reverse, would be, in their opinion, to overturn the laws of nature, and the order of the universe. Specious as all this might have appeared (and nothing that could have been urged in their favour could have appeared more so) yet the author of the inquiry saw the absurdity of self-existent matter. Here then he wisely withdrew from such dangerous guides, and very fairly and fully acknowledges God to have been the Creator of all things, and the author of their nature^a. Thus another kind of reasoning was to be called in, and what had been thought the impregnable fortress being delivered up, we are to enquire how he maintains his position without it.

The author, before he directly enters on the proof of his opinion, makes a previous remark of considerable consequence to him in the course of his book; it being intended for the setting aside the most generally-approved ac-

^a P. 13.

count of the origin of evil. This will likewise best be previously examined by ourselves, as the answer to be returned will have no small influence on some parts of the subsequent remarks.—It has been the rule amongst wise and good men, who enjoyed the light of revelation for a guide to them, to impute the source of evil to the abuse of free-will; this of course acquitted God from being the actual cause of it; and yet, because it permitted his rational creatures, from the nature of their free-agency, themselves to introduce it, the author most violently declares against the possibility of the thing, as inconsistent with wisdom and goodness; for since God's infinite knowledge, which sees all things past, present, and to come, could not be ignorant of the direful event, and his infinite power might at once have prevented it, for this reason there can be no difference betwixt *active and permissive will*^w; they must be exactly the same; which

is

^w The little difference from the author, in the argument that follows, is only in the drawing it up (vide Free Inquiry, p. 11, 12.) It is, I think, clearer, as well as shorter, this way, and has all it's strength; tho' the inquirer seems to have thought the argument enforced from God's knowledge of things, as having all in one instantaneous view, present before him. How this makes every thing God permits, to be an act of his; I cannot apprehend. Were it so, every thing must be absolute fatality; for he sees every thing at one intuitive view, but surely with some difference in the things themselves, some of which he foresees as his own acts; others, as our acts,
under

is as much as to say, there is no difference, whether by any act of his own, God himself brought sin into the world, or only suffered it to be introduced, as he knew it would be, by another. Here he has brought the matter to a point, and the question turns upon it; and yet, having carried his argument to this criterion, he leaves it there without proof, and passes on to another matter. It rests therefore upon ourselves to examine, how justly it is asserted that God's *active and permissive will* must be exactly the same. Now *free-agency* (as I have shewn*) is necessary to the virtue, the happiness, and the very being, of rational creatures; and therefore God's own goodness engaged him to bestow it on man. But the nature of free-will implies a power and permission to abuse it; it could not be free-will without it; and to suppose a man to be a free-agent, and at the same time under force and compulsion, is to suppose a thing to be, and not to be, at the same time. God's permissive will therefore, in this case, implies not any contradiction. Can the same thing be said of God's will, considered as the efficient cause, or agent of evil? the very reverse; it is the

under his permission. So much is plain and intelligible to common sense; and we need no metaphysical reasoning to confirm it.

* The wisdom, the expedience, and necessity of free-agency, are particularly spoke to in the beginning of this Dissertation on Bayle. See also Dissert. on Blasph. c. iv.

plainest

plainest of all contradictions, being inconsistent with his own unchangeable nature, and standing in full opposition to his essential holiness. In the same manner we must answer another dangerous position, that the power of rendering ourselves wicked and miserable, is the highest imperfection imaginable. If this were a power to make ourselves *miserable only*, then indeed it must be a deplorable imperfection; but this would be to take the case by halves, because the power is full, either to avoid the misery, or make ourselves happy; which last surely is the highest privilege, and was the aim and end for which it was given. It is not therefore the power that makes the imperfection, but the abuse of that power, which, whilst we use it as it was designed, as we ought, and as we may, and have means and motives to do, is not imperfection, but the contrary; nor becomes evil till we set up our own wills against God's, and ourselves *make* our imperfection and depravity.

The author however thinks he has discovered a better and surer solution of the abstruse and important question, *Whence came evil?* and not only promises from it the most surprising and useful discoveries in ethicks and metaphysicks, but pronounces it to be the master-key to unlock the very arcana, or mysteries and perplexing doctrines, of Christi-

anity². Let us hear the invaluable secret: The leading mischief, and source of all the misery in the world, is, according to his account, the absolute and invincible necessity of physical evils, arising from the nature and constitution of things; and that these might not fall on beings that should not deserve them, he declares an expediency, or, as he sometimes expresses it, a necessity of moral evil too^a; and on these two points, this author's whole fabrick stands. Of this necessity therefore, good proof may be expected; nor can it be sufficient to say of it (as he does in page 103^b), that it is a most certain truth: His proofs, or arguments, as we find them in the several parts of his book, are, 1st, The imperfection of all created beings. 2dly, The untractableness of matter, out of which the world was formed, and which contained in it all natural evils, and occasioned the necessity of moral ones. 3dly, more especially with respect to our own particular concern, the rank and order in which we stand in the great scale of existencies. 4thly, The confirmation of all this from fact and our own experience in every thing we see about us. To which he adds, 5thly, some incomprehensible con-

² Inquiry, p. 110, 188.

^a Ibid. p. 190.

^b He there calls it, "His first great proposition," and adds, "most certainly true it is, that natural evils exist from some necessity in the nature of things, which no power can dispense with or prevent."

nexion betwixt good and evil, happiness and misery.—I have put all these together, and, I think, in their natural order, and shall consider how far they evince what they are produced for.—As to the evils of imperfection, himself passes them over very slightly: What he says upon them, so far as to affect his general argument, will be taken notice of, when we come to speak to the scale of existencies, with which they have a peculiar connection; at present, we are entering on a more arduous and the most interesting part of his book, natural and moral evils; the origin of these is the great thing we are seeking after, and when this is found, the other kinds, which the author has distributed them into, will easily be reduced under them. But, however ingenious the author is in setting forth our miseries, he is not equally successful in accounting for them. What he saith of natural evils, is in many respects utterly precarious; but of moral evil, absolutely mistaken. We must follow his order, and begin with natural evils; observing in the first place, that the rise of these, from the nature of matter, and the world we live in, is not the thing we contest with the author; this, under proper restrictions, is as readily acknowledged by ourselves, as it is strenuously asserted by him; the point on which we think ourselves obliged to dissent from him is this, that the not correcting the evil qualities in matter, which God himself

had created, and out of which he was to frame the world, was owing to a want of power in him; natural evils, it seems, in his way of arguing, arose spontaneous out of the constitution of things, from the intractableness of that matter which it was formed of; and which it exceeded the power of God to extirpate. He begins with an acknowledged and incontestable truth, that Omnipotence cannot work contradictions, p. 14. After this foundation laid, he affirms, that to produce good exclusive of evil, is impossible; and supports his assertion from the constant mixture of pain with pleasure, and inconvenience with advantage, in every thing around us^c. Let us analyse this first argument, that we may judge of the weight of it: The fact, which gives occasion to the question, stands thus: There is much evil in the world; the question is, how it came to be so: The answer here made, that it was impossible to be otherwise, for that would imply a contradiction; and the proof of this contradiction and impossibility, is taken from the evidence we have of a mixture of evil in every thing about us; so that we are yet got no farther, as to the information wanted, than where we began, and the reason given why the thing *is*, amounts to no more than that *it is*.—However, himself infers somewhat more from this argument in the next paragraph^d; “The true solution

^c Inquiry, p. 15, 16, 77.

^d p. 15.

then

then of this incomprehensible paradox, must be this, that all evils owe their existence solely to the necessity of their own natures;" and he tells us, that he means by this, "that they could not possibly have been prevented, without the loss of some superior good, or the permission of some greater evil than themselves; or that many evils will unavoidably insinuate themselves, by the natural relations and circumstances of things, into the most perfect system of created beings, in opposition to the will of an almighty Creator, by reason they cannot be excluded without working contradictions." The contradictions he means we are not directly informed of here, but may sufficiently discover in the following paragraph, the drift of which is, that if things were made without evil, they must be perfect, which is contradictory to the nature of all created things. But altho' no man in his senses ever supposed absolute perfection in a creature; yet that a thing may be created perfect in a lower sense, that is, in respect to it's own state, without a contradiction any way, is what we shall find a proper occasion to shew by and by. The evils he is here speaking of respect either the endowments (as p. 27, &c.) or the accidents and sufferings of body or mind (p. 49.) Whereas then he tells us, that many evils will unavoidably insinuate themselves into the most perfect system of created beings, in opposition to the will of God, and are

not to be prevented by all his power, we have a right to ask, *How knoweth he all this?* we may be permitted to offer reasons, if we do it with caution and modesty, why God made not the world perfecter, or otherwise than it is; but to presume that he could not make it at all, without the most pregnant seeds of evil in it, or that it exceeded his power to extirpate or qualify them, is, I think, neither suitable to our nature, nor consistent with *his*. Is it credible that infinite wisdom should bring a thing into existence out of nothing, and yet not be able to give it a nature that might be governed, and rendered suitable to his will? Every power, every quality of it, must have been a grant from him; and therefore it is not reconcileable either to his wisdom or goodness, to implant in it such a kind of nature as himself could not manage, such as should debase his creation, counteract him in his great work of a new world, cross his designs, prevent his most gracious intentions in it, in a word, invert the laws of creation, and prescribe to it's Maker, *Hitherto shalt thou come, and no further*. It is, I think, a measure sacredly to be observed by man to his Maker, that he have the fullest evidence of a thing's implying a contradiction, before he takes upon himself to pronounce it out of the power of God to do it. The case before us is incapable of such evidence; no proof has been given of such implication; nor, we may be bold to add, can

can be given of it. The author's catalogue of natural evils, is comprised under poverty, labour, inquietudes of mind, pains of body, death. Let us select any one of these, and ask where the contradiction lies, that the infinite power which made the world, should have warded off the misery or inconvenience of it. And if one of them, or even the greatest of them all, might have been removed, then why not another, and so why not all? God hath infinite resources, which not only exceed our power, but all our knowledge or apprehension. I will advance yet further; it not only might have been done, but actually was done. If I am called upon to prove this, the answer is as just as it is ready; the Bible sure is as good authority as the fancy of any man, whoever he be; now here we learn, that man came innocent out of God's hands, and was so placed that it depended on himself to continue such; that he had never died, if he had never sinned; could never have been poor in paradise, whilst he maintained his innocence there. He had been subjected to no more labour than what would have been pleasing and eligible to him, and given a better relish to his innocent delights. Inquietudes of mind, in that situation, could only arise from sense of guilt; and pains and diseases, which are the preludes of death, may not be supposed to enter, 'till the sentence of death was itself denounced: Even that exact temperature of

climate, the purest food, the most rational use of it, the harmonious constitution of the humours and parts of the body, under the blessing and command of God upon man's innocence, would all conspire to preserve him in ease and mundane happiness, till, matured in virtue, obedience, gratitude, love, he might be translated in God's own time and way, and method, to a still more happy world. And where is the absurdity or contradiction to the nature of the thing, that the power and the wisdom of God might thus dispose causes and effects, that there should be a constant course of mild and healthful seasons, our bodies of vigorous and strong constitutions, with means to keep them so; such as some ingenious men have conjectured, might be the use of the tree of life? Whether it were so intended or not, it cannot be doubted, that it was in the power of God to provide this, or like means, to answer the end. He hath not left us without specimens of his power to do more than this; to controul all nature; to change or suspend it's laws; to exalt and refine it's substance; to stop the course of the sun, or make the sea divide and stand on an heap; to raise the dead to life; and infallibly foreshew the events of future ages, the rise and fall of kings and kingdoms; and equally the greatest or least affairs of the world, beyond all our comprehension, beyond all the force of physical powers, and in contradiction to them. I have
mentioned

mentioned these instances, not at all to infer from them, that such a state of nature, as we have been describing, must be supported by perpetual exertions of an extraordinary providence, and a constant series of miracles, but to shew the folly of being too bold with God's power, and the little reason there is for doubting it to be within the compass of his wisdom and ability, to have contrived and settled, in this our system, a regular and constant course of things, suited to a paradisaical state, as described above. I know very well, when we talk of another course than what we see at present, some men are apt to cry out at once, This is another world, and man would not be man, but a different creature in it; yet such a system of nature could have been no way inconsistent with the nature of innocent man, such as we suppose him to have come forth out of the hands of his Maker. That this not only might have been so, but actually was, in the beginning, we are well assured; and this overturns the great postulatam they go upon, which is a supposition that the present world is the same, and proceeds in the same course it was first created in: But revelation represents the matter quite otherwise; and it is evidently deducible from thence, that the wisdom of God made the world such as to be capable of being suited, either to a state of innocence or a state of sin. It is perhaps an error in the *Inquiry*, to which some of the
most

most considerable mistakes in it may be referred, that natural evils were prior to moral. 'Tis true, the natural may be admitted to have been provisionally prior, i. e. They may have been prepared, so as to be brought forth when occasion should require them; like the means of punishment in all well-regulated governments; but if prior in act or execution, then it was the cruellest of all absurdities, punishment inflicted before guilt incurred. It is most certain, that, upon man's revolt, there was a curse laid upon the earth, and a train of physical evils succeeded: The noxious seeds, that were latent, and would have been ever so, had not moral evil first appeared, threw up apace; thorns also and thistles, and sterility, and, we may conclude, inclement and malignant seasons, both in the justice of God and his mercy too, followed, to bring man to a sense of his folly, and be one means of preventing his everlasting misery. Thus was the world, the stage of man's probation, again rendered suitable to his *moral* state, an altered and corrupted world to an altered and corrupted man; "a world in which we groan and travel in pain until now, waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our bodies^e;" so that even these bodies of ours, to which the world seems congenial, are themselves, whilst in it, but in a state of

^e Rom. viii. 22, 23.

slavery and violence^f. There is then no arguing from what we see a guilty world to be now, to what it was before sin entered. It is highly reasonable to suppose God's holiness and justice shewed it's displeasure upon it's entrance, and gave the world a severer face: originally all was good; misery entered not, 'till sin had entered; and it was not God, but ourselves, that introduced the latter; if God sent in misery, it was a secondary act, subsequent to our trial, and so an act of judgment, suitable to his infinite righteousness and wisdom.—But is not this, we may be asked, acknowledging, that God's own works may, after all, be unmanageable by him? how else comes it to pass, that his will should be defeated, as it often is, by ourselves? Did he not give us free-will? and yet does not this gift frequently cross his aim, and disappoint his intended mercy? true, it doth; but where do we say, in the language of this author, that it exceeds the power of God to overbear our wills? On the other hand, when those wills pursue courses highly displeasing to him, and repugnant to his aim, and bring them into

^f Therefore those philosophers, that stand in the first rank for wisdom and virtue, seem to have been thoroughly aware of this; though they knew not how to account for it, otherwise than by supposing the present state not the original one of man, but a prison and school of correction for misconduct in a former, with the privilege of a further trial.

execution too, it is his own nature, and the rectitude of his own choice, and nothing intractable *ab extra*, that restrains his power from putting a force upon them. This then I apprehend, with all reverence and humility, to be the just conclusion of the whole matter. God's wisdom and holiness saw it best and worthiest, that man should be virtuous, and then happy from being so; he could not be virtuous without a probation; he could not have a probation without free-will; his free-will could not be proved without a temptation and trial: Under these circumstances, while man maintained his faith and integrity, every thing about him conspired to make him happy; as soon as he rebelled, the sluices of evils were thrown open upon him: The ways and means for the effecting this were as easy to the Deity, as they were infinitely various; perhaps a small different direction given to matter, the heightening or lessening some law of motion, some new position to the earth we live upon*, might be sufficient to awaken the

* It seems more than a strain of fancy, somewhat worthy the judgment of a philosopher, as well as the sublime imagination of a Milton, which he puts down amongst the unfavourable changes that God's justice might see fit to introduce into this our system, for the punishment of rebellious man,

"Some say he bid his angels turn ascant

"The poles of earth twice ten degrees and more

"From the sun's axle; they with labour push'd

"Oblique the centric globe."

PAR. LOST, B. x. 668.

dormant

dormant mischiefs, and wonderfully hurt the ease, the accommodations, or the life of it's inhabitants. Thus man was at once punished for what was past, and taught to return to better obedience, if he would at length learn and be wise. In this order of dispensations, we see nothing but what is worthy of God; we see a provision made for all events; we discover God's righteousness in restraining natural evils, till moral ones made them necessary: in the whole we distinguish his mercy, even in punishment; aiming his judgments for our recovery, and bowing all nature to his great and holy purposes. How incomparably juster and better suited to the nature and attributes of the Deity, is this representation of things, than that which exhibits him struggling with the stubbornness of his materials, and forced, in some measure, to submit to their inflexibility at last!

But the more interesting part of the question is still behind: Moral evil is of much higher consideration than natural; the honour of the Deity is more concerned in it's origin, as well as it's effects are infinitely more important to ourselves; our natural evils, or the miseries of this life, being terminated with it; but the moral ones we incur carrying their influence to eternity; to all which I must add the difficulty of the subject. The author of the *Inquiry* professes, page 78 and 82, never to have seen it accounted for by any author, ancient
or

or modern, in a manner that could give tolerable satisfaction to a rational inquirer. A subject so arduous, and so momentous, demands our attention to all the lights afforded to us, and all our care and caution not to be misled in the search, either by prejudice or credulity. Let us hear in the first place his own account, that we may judge whether he has succeeded better than those that have gone before him. After having pleaded for the absolute necessity of natural evils in the creation, he proceeds to remove all dishonour that, in this way of accounting for things, might be reflected upon the Deity, from the event or consequence of these evils; for he argues^b, that "if misery could not be excluded from the works of the Creator by infinite power, these miseries must be endured by some creatures or other, for the good of the whole; and if there were none capable of wickedness, they must then fall to the share of the perfectly innocent; here (saith he) the Deity is obliged either to afflict innocence, or be the cause of wickedness; he has plainly no other option: What then could infinite wisdom, justice, and goodness, do in this situation more consistent with itself, than to call into being creatures formed with such depravity in their dispositions, as to induce many of them to act in such manner, as to render themselves proper subjects for such ne-

^b Free inquiry, p. 103, 104, 105.

cessary sufferings, and yet, at the same time, endued with such a degree of reason and free-will, as to put it in the power of every individual to escape them by their good behaviour." What a revolution is this! He that, but a page or two before, had most vehemently insisted that it was quite the same thing whether a Creator of infinite power and knowledge made beings originally wicked and miserable, or gave them a power to make themselves so, foreknowing they would employ that power to their destruction; and had in the same paragraph asserted, that the making man free would by no means justify the introduction of moral evil; himself now calls in aid this very free-will, to justify the Deity who gave it, tho' he foreknew the abuse of it. But it was necessary not to admit free-will to be any justification, in order to set aside the received account; and no less necessary to admit it so to be, to support his own; and therefore he closes the summary here given of his hypothesis, with the following high recommendation of it, "That in it we see a substantial reason for the depravity of man; and the admittance of moral evil in these circumstances seems compatible with the justice of God; and one of the highest instances of consummate wisdom, in ordering and disposing all things, in the best manner their imperfect nature will admit." Were the case really thus, the author hath indeed made a discovery,

discovery, tho' no way conducive to the happiness or comfort of man, yet certainly, as that of the poet,

" ——— Insigne, recens, adhuc

" Indictum ore alio."

HOR.

Ourselves can only express our wonder at the wildness and extravagance of the fancy. Strange! that the thing which God aims to keep out of the world above every thing else; the thing that his beloved Son came down from heaven to conquer and destroy; the thing that he hates beyond all things, nay the only thing that he hates, even moral evil or sin, should be the support of his creation, his own contrivance and vindication in the making such a system. One would expect a paradox like this, in order to make it's way in the world, should bring along with it uncommon evidence, adequate to balance the strangeness of the matter advanced under it. But here it is far otherwise; the notion labours under incomparably greater inconveniences than it would remove; the reasonableness it professes contradicts the sure and plainest attributes of the Deity; and any benefits or advantages proposed from it, are merely imaginary, and what neither are, nor can be, brought about by any such system as this; all which will appear as we come to particulars. In the first place then, this account of moral evil sets off, with the glaring absurdity that sin, the greatest of all evils, and the highest possible dishonour to the

the creation, is in this way called in by the Creator, as a remedy for evils of a much lower kind than itself, of a mere physical nature, and which infer no moral defilement; a piece of management so unworthy the all-wise God, that it more resembles the ignorant rashness of some bold empirick amongst ourselves, who should cure a pain in the finger, by driving the malady to the heart.—2dly, This remedy, thus devised, to the dishonour of the Deity and his work, is incompetent to effect the end it is pretended to answer. This is said to be, that there might not be wanting wicked persons, whom the natural evils of the world might be justly inflicted upon, and so the good and virtuous might thereby escape themⁱ. Is it so then that, by this disposition of things, good men escape the evils of life, and bad men suffer them? On the other hand, is there not ordinarily one event to the righteous, and to the wicked? Does a plague, or an earthquake, make distinctions? or do the sufferings of wicked men any more lessen the afflictions of the virtuous, than those of the virtuous relieve the wicked^k? It is sufficient

ⁱ See, as above referred to, pages 103, 104.

^k I know not whether the Free-inquirer hath not here provided himself with a reserve in case of need. His terms seem guarded; and, in opposition to wicked men, he useth not the general denomination of *good men*, but of a much stricter, the *perfectly innocent*. Is it that, if he should be pressed with the course of things, not at all answering his
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scheme

ask these questions ; the facts are clear, and answer for themselves, demonstrating at once, such a course of things, as is utterly repugnant to the end in this inquirer's scheme. But turn the tables ; and say, as our fore-fathers have wisely and justly said before us, not that sin was contrived for the sake of natural evils, but that natural evils were called forth to punish sin ; and nothing is more worthy of the Deity, nothing more easily understood by any plain honest man, nothing that he so instantly distinguishes the reasonableness and justice of.—3dly, Neither is the method less daring and obnoxious, in which this remedy is supposed introduced into the world. God, seeing the multitude of natural evils inseparably cleaving to his material creation, did, as the inquirer frequently tells us, and as ourselves,

scheme (good men being no more exempt from natural evils than bad ones), he may parry off the objection by replying, none are perfectly innocent, and none therefore have a right to be exempted ; but the justice of God stands acquitted, tho' the best of men share in natural miseries, as they are not free from moral evil.—Supposing the author had such plea in view, still it does nothing towards clearing up the greater difficulties which lie against the account, how natural or moral evil entered into the world ; and tho' it so far acquit the justice of the Creator, that all men should suffer, because all sin ; yet neither does this at all account for what we daily see, the unequal dispensations of natural good and evil, and their comparative disproportion to the qualities and merits of the several persons to whose portion they fall. Another life unravels the mystery, but nothing else can.

in attending his reasoning, are obliged frequently to repeat, bring into being creatures formed with evil dispositions, by indulging which they would become morally evil, and so might in justice have the natural evil laid upon them. And lest we should not take in his whole aim and meaning, he distinctly declares these evil dispositions to be given for this end, that some creatures might render themselves proper subjects for the miseries of the world; and that they may more effectually answer this end, they are represented, in the different parts of the book, in such manner as supposes it impossible for the person so disposed to bear up against them. God knew, he says, the incomprehensible secret, why it was necessary many should sin, and be punished for it¹. And though he sometimes asserts the reason and freedom that were given with such dispositions, sufficient to acquit the Deity, yet he soon unsays all again; he acknowledges God to be the author of sin^m; he observes it to be the predestinarian doctrineⁿ, that some men come into the world, with dispositions invincibly bad; and however unjust it may appear to many, yet, under his notion of a previous necessity, he approves and justifies it. In the same paragraph, the wretches that are sent into life so miserably furnished, are supposed to be left to the tyranny of their passions,

¹ P. 107.

^m p. 108.

ⁿ p. 112, 113.

without any assistance when they come there; every thing of this sort is, it seems, limited to others, whom he has given better dispositions to, and further protects them from vice, by a powerful, but invisible influence called grace°. And thus we see the end assigned unworthy of God; the means, or sin, by which he was to bring about that end, the most contradictory to his holiness; and the punishment inflicted inconsistent with his justice; whence, instead of being eased from any difficulties on our own account of evil, from the abuse of free-will, we are involved in all the mazes of predestination, nor can his scheme of necessity in the least relieve us. In justification, however, of this proceeding, there is a reason so often mentioned by him, and really in itself of so great weight, if called in on a proper occasion, that it must be heard; it is the general good which is produced from it. The argument, drawn up in a summary way, is thus; “without moral evil, natural ones could not properly be disposed of; and without natural ones, there could be no creation at all; some individuals may indeed suffer, but the felicity of a few must give way to the good of a whole; and thus partial evil becomes general good.” “Shall man thus

° P. 113. see also 99, 100. where all the reason and free-will of bad men is sunk to nothing; and their follies and vices resolved into original frame, or education.

talk deceitfully for God?" There is this grand defect in the argument, that at the same time that God is represented as richly providing for some, the foundation is laid in and by the misery of others. But God's ways are not as man's ways; his infinite perfection can never be just by halves, nor be cruel, oppressive, or hard to a single individual, any more than betray his own perfections. But partial evil is general good; a maxim this, in many instances, wise and good, yet not to be understood universally, and at random; particularly, as in this case, applied by the inquirer, to moral evil, it was a mean, incompatible with God's holiness to recur to, as I have observed above; it is totally opposite to the true good of his creation, and so far from being a foundation of happiness to the nobler or rational beings in it, that it is the parent of all misery. God, it is true, in his wisdom, may, and does, bring good out of evil, moral as well as physical; yet there is a wide difference betwixt his turning to some good end, that wickedness which man's own folly had devised and brought about, and himself contriving, and causing sin, in order to take off the improper effect of natural evils. The author's striking out such a fancy is the more extraordinary, as there is not the least occasion to have recourse to the expedient; for there is

Job. xiii. 7.

O 3

evidently

evicently a wise and good end in natural evils, and which itself accounts for them: Matter received it's qualities and properties, as well as it's substance, from God, but all under his own command, and to be exerted as his wisdom should see fit, and occasion require. Moral evil was the great thing that the goodness of God aimed to prevent, and he took the methods best suited to wisdom and holiness, and man's happiness, either in the first place, to keep it out of the world, or in the second, to check it's progress and increase in it; so far was it from being a necessary support to our system, that it above all dishonoured and defaced it, was introduced beside and against the will of God, and is what the Son of God came to destroy, and will in the end destroy it for ever.

The author, at the head of his arguments for the unavoidable necessity of natural evils, assigns the imperfection of all created beings^a. Something I have observed upon this, in the order as it is ranked by him^b: a fuller review of it was then deferred to make way for more interesting parts of his book: It will not be amiss to resume the subject here; and first of all, his general reason from creation, as such, shall be considered, and then what is deduced by him from the particular rank which Providence has allotted to ourselves. From this

^a P. 17. and the whole second letter. ^b See above.

imperfection

imperfection then, although he acknowledges that it is not to be reckoned an evil itself, yet, what cannot be acquitted of absurdity, he derives all the evils of created beings from it; for every creature is by nature subordinate, and subordination, he saith, “is that imperfection from which all the evils we feel, and all we see around us, intirely proceed.” Now creation, as such, excludes no perfection less than absolute and infinite; what is not such may be communicated by God, if he so please; and therefore we may say in general, that to create a perfect being does not exceed the power of God, because the not having absolute or infinite perfection, is in creatures no imperfection, and so no evil. As to the particular orders of beings, which God hath already created; these, great as some of them may be, are far beneath the perfection that it is in the power of God to give a creature; and yet notwithstanding were not made imperfect. The only just and true measure by which to estimate the natural perfection or imperfection of any creature, is its suitableness to that rank and order of beings wherein it stands, and it's own happiness in that order: If it is endowed with what is requisite in it's rank, and furnished with all the powers and means of rendering itself happy therein, it is then naturally perfect; and so far is it from any proof

of imperfection, that there is a being or beings superior to it; that it is the best security to it's felicity, that there is one of infinitely greater perfection than itself, and both able and willing to continue to it the power and means of happiness; and if itself chooses, will not only make it truly happy, but keep it so. Mere subordination, therefore, can never infer such imperfection as necessarily draws along with it, upon all created beings, positive evils. It proves not any restraint upon God, that might prevent his making rational creatures perfect in their order, and giving them a power to continue so; and if it does not prove this, it proves nothing to his purpose. Let us see then, whether what he would infer from that particular rank of creatures in which man is placed will succeed any better; for tho' all subordination, as such, will not carry his point; still may there not, in the long scale of existences, be subordinate beings so low in the scale, as to be necessarily attended with real and great evils? and may not man himself make such a link in it? For "the universe," he says, "is a system, whose very essence consists in subordination, a scale of beings descending by insensible degrees, from infinite perfection, to absolute nothing." "Of that vast chain man is one link, and as there are many thousands below him, so there must be

many more above him^u." And again, that in the gradation there must be somewhere such a creature as man, with all his infirmities about him^w." In this way of reasoning, we find man weak and miserable by original creation, and from the hands of his Maker; we find him such, both as to his natural and moral powers; by the order of things, from necessity, and the place of his link in the great chain of beings, and not thro' his own folly or misconduct; circumstances these, one would think, little suited to a vindication of Providence, or the honour of that scale, which is thus made to take in not imperfections only, but all natural evils. And yet, after all, any such gradation, tho' clear of these exceptions, may, for aught we know, be but a pleasing fancy and illusion. Men of wit, and lively imagination, may amuse themselves and others, with conceptions of this sort, and whilst they consider them but as possible, may draw good use as well as entertainment from them, by enlarging their ideas of God's infinite power, wisdom and bounty^x; but to bring them into debates,

▪ P. 65.

▪ P. 98.

^x Mr. Locke, and Mr. Addison, who understood and loved true religion well, and believed Christianity to be such, have patronized this opinion, and treated the subject with great delicacy and good sense; but they knew where to stop, and the notion is advanced by them in such manner, that, tho' a thing quite problematical, and (if I may be excused giving my opinion after so great men) in a the-

debates, and sound arguments and conclusions upon them, is to call in the aid of what are to us but visionary worlds, to clear up doubts and difficulties in our own. It is very certain that, in the whole universe of God's works, the different kinds of rational and accountable creatures, which we know any thing of, and in which the power and glory of God are most discovered, do not exceed two, and ourselves make one of them^r. There is too little dependance on analogical reasoning, to form any just argument for more upon it. For as to what hath been said^s, that there must be as great or greater variety of different species in the scale of beings above us, as there are below us, what say they more than that the notion pleases themselves? for in respect to proof, they neither have, nor in their present state can have any, unless it should please God to assure us of it by special revelation; whereas we know, upon the evidence of what hath been already revealed, that angels are the *internuncii*, or messengers betwixt God and man; communication with them, on extraordinary occasions, is certain; but of any in-

a theological view, not at all probable, yet no fences are broken down, no foundations disturbed, or ill consequences drawn from it. Vide *Spectat.* N^o. 519.

^r Evil spirits, being fallen angels, are not to be reckoned a different species from angels.

^s See the argument from analogy, and the scale of existencies, in the *Free inquiry*, p. 28, 65, 66, 67, 93.

intermediate

intermediate beings betwixt us and them, we have neither experience, nor knowledge, nor information, which is a much stronger argument against the existence of such, than any analogy can be for it; it being incredible that those that are nearer to us, if any such there be, should never be employed in God's commerce with us; and, what above all ought to discredit the notion, scripture does in very many places speak of men and angels as two immediate ranks of beings distinguished only by their own order, and not intercepted by any other. And if we have so little reason to believe any different orders or species of intelligent creatures betwixt us and angels, we have as little to conclude there are any such betwixt God and them. The argument, from the infinite distance, or chasm, betwixt one and the other, and the improbability there should be no monuments of God's handy-works, no creatures to praise him in the amazing vacuity, defeats itself; and is therefore ingenuously given up by the Free-inquirer, for tho' we add our thousands, or ten thousands to the scale, there remains an infinite void still, and we find ourselves under the same difficulty as when we set out at first. The glories and mercies of the redemption do now connect heaven and earth together; there is no chasm betwixt us and angels, they make us in heaven, *ωαγγι-λοι*; they answer for all distance, all vacuity, to bring us to God, by raising us to become brethren

brethren of the true Son of God, and making us the adopted children of the Father, the fountain of all^a.

The author, in proof of his fundamental doctrine, the invincible necessity of evils, and the impossibility of God's producing good exclusive of evil, in sundry places, appeals to fact, and experience^b, particularly in the letters on political and religious evils, where he gives us a strong, but exaggerated picture of human depravity. The portrait may, in some part, and some uncommon times, be just;

^a I cannot leave the subject, without taking some notice of the extraordinary light the author hath struck out upon it; and especially as it may stand for a specimen what weight we are to lay on the analogical conclusions he draws from it! After deducing from the innumerable species of beings below man, that there must be as many above him, he carries on the argument, from our being clothed with the spoils, and fed by the miseries and destruction of our inferiors, that it becomes highly probable, ourselves are subjected in like manner to the beings above us; and as we receive great part of our pleasures, and even subsistence, from the sufferings and death of lower animals, may not, he asks, these superior beings do the same from ours, tho' we cannot conceive the manner, in which these benefits accrue to them? p. 65, 66, &c. *Jocone hæc an seriò dicit?* The thing is too absurd for an answer, nor could come from his sense upon any other motive, than that at the time of his writing *dulce erat dissipere*; the drollery of the fancy pleased him; we too might laugh with him at the oddity of it; but the matter is very serious, and is supposed to be argued seriously, so that such sallies of whim, on such occasion, are unworthy both the subject, and the understanding of the writer.

^b P. 15. and elsewhere.

but

but a general judgment of men, and the world, is no more to be drawn from it, than the characters of individuals are to be estimated from downright satire, or panegyrick; however, this is not the point; had the question been whether there were any such things as natural or moral evils, or whether all men are not weak and impotent, whether thousands of individuals are not wretched and miserable; in a word, whether the world lieth not under sin and corruption, there could have been no better and surer way than to bid us look round us and see. But neither the reality nor multiplicity of evils in the world, nor the corruption or depravity of man, are denied, or questioned; and therefore the haranguing on facts, as if they were evidence in the case, when the original cause and grounds of the facts are the things wanted, is but to draw off the attention of the reader from the true point, and put the matter on a wrong issue. He resolves indeed the train of follies and vices, which he describes, into the evil nature of things, and corrupt appetites and passions of men^b, which surely is saying nothing, for it begets only another question, whence came this evil into the nature of things, this depravity and corruption of human appetites and passions? and thus it casts us back to where we began. But the inquirer hath still

^b P. 137.

another reason why omnipotence could not produce good without evil; and this is "from connections to us inconceivable, it being impracticable for omnipotence to produce the one, without at the same time, permitting the other"; so that, as he elsewhere expresses it, he was obliged to admit both, or give existence to neither." This, I think, is the only general argument in defence of his system, that we have not yet paid some attention to. Our reply, in this case, must be much the same as in the former; we are to stick close to the point in question, and remember the inquiry is not whether there be such connexion, but how it came to be; for the author, from only seeing them mixed, or one following another, assumes an original and absolute necessity in nature, that it must be so, and this superior to any will or power of the Deity, to have created them otherwise. The author, I suppose, had physical good and evil in view here; and these, no doubt, do often produce each the other; our food may surfeit, or a fever, properly managed, may work off the noxious humours, and sometimes mend the constitution; a long course of prosperity may be at once reversed by some cross event; as, on the other hand, adversity be as unexpectedly changed to its contrary. But why must we pronounce any thing of this incomprehensible? Say with him

it is owing to the nature of the things, but the argument can go no further; and what is this, to prove the only thing that wanted proving, a necessary, intractable, invincible, inherence of evil in those things, as they came out of the hands of a good and a gracious God? In very many cases, the physical cause appears, and we can fully account for the event: and where it lies out of sight, and we know not when nor how it works, yet we need not be at a loss, if we will take up, as we ought, with a moral cause. God's own wisdom hath appointed a mixture of evil with good, that as we are but strangers and pilgrims here, we might not grow too fond of the place, and so forget a better world. The pains annexed to our pleasures, arise from the excess or abuse of those pleasures; and what more fatherly care and goodness can there be than these warnings given us to retreat betimes, to master and subdue our appetites, which, by having too loose a rein, would, for a little present gratification, bring upon us lasting and bitter remorse. Above all, we may see and adore the goodness of God, who this way fits us for heaven, and makes the passage safer and surer for us; whilst we are wedded to the world and its delights, we are not prepared or qualified for heaven; but seeing so much vanity, folly, and misery in our present state, we both have a conviction, that a wise and gracious God has something better in
reserve

reserve for us, and are more enabled to keep our affections so disengaged, that when the time of our happy change cometh, we may be capable of enjoying it. In short, it is not any connection, but the uncertainty and inequality in the event and run of things in the world, that hath been the great matter of wonder and perplexity to men, and must be so, 'till going into God's sanctuary, and consulting his Holy Scriptures, we see there the occasion of it, and the clear resolution of the whole, in the fuller assurance given us of a future reckoning, when all the irregularities of this life shall be adjusted by the rule of infinite wisdom, justice, and truth. All we can gain by our recourse to incomprehensible connections, is to lose ourselves in turning aside after such devices, when, at the same time, we have before us a clear, a rational, and authenticated account of this matter, from the change that followed man's disobedience; and how much safer, we may justly ask, how much more satisfactorily shall we ascribe it to the consequences of the fall, to God's withdrawing, in no small degree, his favour and gracious influences upon man, and the melancholy change in the habit of our bodies and the temper of our souls, than to occult qualities and connexions, which we neither know what they are, nor what to ascribe them to, nor how far they extend?

It is no wonder if the Inquirer, after all he has said for the necessity of natural and moral evils, and the uses he assigns to them, at length recoils upon himself, and declares his ignorance^d, why misery hath existence at all, or what interest it serves in the general system. Let all that doubt here go to Scripture, and there they may learn. This teaches us the guilt of sin, and the justice of God in the punishment of it. The evils of the world are made the trial of our virtue, the tests of our resignation and obedience; and God assures us, these light and momentary afflictions, born with a true Christian spirit and temper, will work out for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory. These are ends worth the knowing; but what poor consolation, what but discouraging prospects, or mean hopes, can arise from a system that seems in some degree to put us out of God's protection? natural evil, according to the inquirer, being essential to it, and not to be removed by all the power of God; and moral evil too, which is the greatest and most to be dreaded of all evils, necessary thro' the former: Moral is not indeed supposed, as in the case of natural evils, to be inherent originally and essentially in the nature of things; but God is said to sow the seeds, and this not only

^d P. 117.

with a knowledge that they will, but in order that they may, produce the sad harvest we behold; yet taking care, at the same time, to devise such method as may remove the blame from himself; and cast it on the wretched delinquents. As irreconcilable as all this is with the nature of God, the author thinks he sees reason in the procedure; and assures us, that without some such method God could not have made the world at all; and not to have made it, would have been to prevent much greater good, in order to avoid a less evil. Is then the righteousness of God less than that of man, that he should do evil that good may come of it? Is his wisdom so stunted, is his arm so short, that he could contrive no method, or could execute none, that should stand clear of such amazing absurdity?

The next thing that comes in course to be considered is the fifth letter; but here we find little or nothing that is not obviated already; for political evils, which make the subject of the letter, how much soever they may contribute to lengthen out the list of our miseries and corruptions, are, by the author's own account, all resolved into the depravity of men; inseparable they are said to be from human governments, by Omnipotence itself; and

* P. 123, 125, 143.

owing to the nature of things^f, and the nature of man, p. 137. Thus we are got back again into the classes of natural and moral evils; and political ones are evidently to be accounted for as branches only, or parts of the others, operating in matters of government and polity. The author's management is the same in treating of religious evils; he lays the foundation of them in moral ones, and therefore we say, recourse need only be had to the origin of these for the fountain and original of the others. Here then we might take leave of the letters, but that the author officiously steps out of his way, to prove man to be incapable either of discovering or receiving a true, rational, and explicit system of theology and ethicks^g. He quarrels with reason as not sufficient to guide us, and with revelation for not enabling it to do it. If the charge be just, how pitiable our situation! if otherwise, it is a debt we owe to the wisdom and power of God, to the honour of religion, to our own best comforts, to the encourage-

^f If by the nature of things, he intends here the nature of government, as such, this is not true. The great art and aim in this 5th letter, seems to have been obliquely, by multiplying and aggravating the various evils arising in a point of such universal concern as government and social happiness, to draw the reader in to conclude evils to be necessarily and essentially inherent in the nature of man and all about him, and thereby shift off the question as to any later original of it.

^g P, 154, 191, 163.

ment of our endeavours after virtue, and our aspirings after holiness and Christian perfection to remove the imputation. The weakness of natural reason, and it's precarious or mistaken deductions on the one hand, and the perverseness and propensity of our wills to corrupt truth on the other, are the things pleaded as sure proofs that ourselves have no competent guides within us to virtue and happiness. These are fertile topicks to declaim upon, and the author has made his use of them; the misfortune is, *ita fugit ut præter casam*^b; he runs the matter to such extravagance, as quite to overshoot his mark, and destroy all the credit of his argument. The lamentation and outcry he hath raised on the occasion, as if we were deserted or betrayed by reason, seem to indicate he was out of humour when he wrote, and therefore made larger demands upon it, and the religion deducible from it, than were necessary, and than God exacted from us. The justest light in which we can look upon ourselves and our state here, is that of a probation, not capable of attaining perfection in this world, but candidates for it in another; our virtues, our attainments, our souls themselves, are all in their growth indeed at present, but vastly short of maturity; our moral powers weak, our natural faculties unequal, as is evident from all experience, to

^b Ter. Phor. v. 2, 3.

draw out, unassisted and of themselves, an unerring indefective natural religion; and yet thro' the mercies of God, and the merits of our Redeemer, where no more than natural light is granted, sufficient, we trust, to save us; our happiness, much chequered for the present, and yet not without many comforts, and those too, by a proper use of them, made subservient to a state of complete felicity hereafter. In these circumstances, after all the dismal scenery exhibited in the *Inquiry*, where is the deplored impossibility of attaining our end, and becoming wise, and virtuous, and happy, if the fault be not in ourselves? We have enough to bless God for in respect of our beings, for our faculties, for what we have within us, for what we see and enjoy without us, for such a degree of happiness as is at present granted to us, for the means of attaining greater, and the hopes of doing it. Weak as we are, and vain as is the world, we may sanctify it's enjoyments, and make such use of it's disappointments and crosses, that both shall help to procure us an immortal crown of glory and happiness. Much, or all of this, reason tells us, and revelation ensures the whole to us; but the Inquirer, as he makes light of what reason can do for us, so he does too of the aids of it from revelation. "If God ever condescended to assist our reason with his infinite wisdom, even the religion

gion, he saysⁱ, resulting from that supernatural assistance, must still be deficient, in almost every one of the principal requisites necessary towards accomplishing the great and beneficent ends it was designed for; must want universality to render it impartial, authenticity to make it demonstrable, perspicuity to make it intelligible, and policy to make it useful to mankind." I shall offer a few remarks on each: The first of them, the want of universality, as this seems to be supported by experience, is the most plausible, and yet it goes entirely upon a mistaken sense of that universality which is requisite to Christianity. For tho' it would be iniquitous, or cruel, if all men universally were to be judged by a law that was not universally revealed; yet if God should have granted revelations of his will, in different degrees, at different periods, and to different people of the world; and at the same time should make each revelation the rule of judgment for those only whom the revelation was granted to, what could be more reasonable, or better suited to the perfect law of equity? Now thus it is God deals with the world; He that never knew more than the natural law, shall be tried by that law, according to the attainments he could make in it; and he to whom the gospel is revealed, will be judged by the gospel: At no

ⁱ Page 161, and 167.

time, and in no situation, will God make impossible demands upon us. On the one hand therefore, as it is certain that religion, in the general notion of it, is so far universal, that there will not be wanting a rule by which every man will be most unerringly judged; so on the other, nothing hinders, but that God's wisdom may see reason, and his mercy and goodness determine, to discover more to some than to others, and require of each suitable improvements. Hence it is that Scripture represents Christianity as matter of high grace to those it is revealed to, but what makes necessary, at the same time, great returns of duty and obedience for it. There is however a sense, and a very momentous one, in which Christianity must be allowed to be strictly and properly universal, being of such a nature as to be purposely fitted for general use, not limited, like that of the Jews, to any particular people or persons, but intended for all, and binding on all, as knowledge is afforded to them. Such is Christianity, and as such the commission runs to the first preachers of it, "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature^k;" and this they were to execute not at once, but in a due course of time, under a series of prophetic events, which God's good providence was to go on with, 'till, before the end of the world, it

^k Mark xv, 16.

should be preached and propagated in every nation under heaven, when, in the language of the prophet¹, "the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea." This account, perhaps, may not yet come up to the demands of the Inquirer; there is then another thing, which I apprehend we may truly add, and which ought to dispel any remaining clouds of doubt and diffidence that hang on the minds of any of us; to wit, that the effects and benefits of the Christian dispensation, even in the most interesting point, the pardon of our sins, were, from the beginning of the world, strictly universal^m. Christ, our sacrifice, was not only in the decree of God, but in the virtue and effect of it, as accepted by the Father, tho' future, slain from the foundation of the worldⁿ; the covenant of the redemption ratified, and all that, under the law of nature, ever were, or can be saved, were and must be so, only thro' the ransom paid by Christ. Here then is a dispensation, universal in it's extent, being suited to all nations, exclusive of none; universal in it's benefit, as the great propitiation on which it is founded is universal in it's influence; and mercy imparted to all, being made for the sins of the whole world; universal in point of

¹ Isa. xi. 9.

^m This is more largely considered in a separate dissertation on the foundation of moral rectitude.

ⁿ Rev. xiii. 8.

time, from the beginning of the world; and universal in obligation, binding all men to receive it, and obey it's rules, whenever revealed and made known unto them.

In respect to authenticity, the Inquirer allows some degree of credibility to Christianity, from the internal excellence both of it's morality and theology, so much beyond the attempts of the wisest philosophers, and the capacities of those who published it to the world; which, considered with it's obscure rise and amazing progress, will, he acknowledges, scarcely permit us to doubt but that there must be something supernatural in it. So far right; here we are *almost* Christians; let us pursue the track, and we may become *altogether* so. But at this point the gentleman unhappily makes a stand, and attacks successively the several grand means which the wisdom of God appointed for the planting and propagating Christianity, and delivering it down, properly ascertained and attested, to future ages; for such were many essential parts of it, that in their nature they could neither be discovered without a divine revelation, nor authorized without supernatural vouchers; in consequence of which, we find, Christianity ever claims inspiration for the assurance of the truth of it, and appeals to miracles in evidence of that inspiration. Let us see then what the

Inquirer's opinion is of this matter. He sets aside the claim of inspiration, because, "on the one hand, to suppose all men to be inspired, is a thing absurd in it's nature; and on the other, the inspiration of only a few particular persons must ever be liable to infinite uncertainty, because there are no marks by which the fact can be ascertained to us, nor any faculties in the human mind which are able to distinguish it." The attestation of miracles he rejects, "as too precarious to establish the divine authority of a revelation upon, since we know so very little of the nature of them; or of the nature of the beings they may be performed by; or what power, inclination, or permission, such beings may have to deceive us." And if these points fail even at the fountain, "how can we be assured of any Divine authority, thro' the fallacious mediums of tradition or history?" The former, he says, is nothing more than a complication of designed fraud, and inevitable error; in this we have little concern; but a great deal in the faith of history, and incomparably the more, when interesting and authenticated as the records of Christianity are; however he pronounces of all without exception, "that the writers being men, we can never be certain that they were not imposed on themselves, or did not intend to impose on others; that therefore it's original

evidence cannot be conclusive, but must grow daily weaker in proportion to it's antiquity." If this be true, how bankrupt in credit must Christianity be, which has been in a continual decline about seventeen hundred years! Alas! are then all our assurances fallen to this? We that trusted heaven and earth might sooner pass away than our blessed Saviour's word and work should fail us, have we at last no more to depend upon than an undetermined problem, a mere peradventure? But we will not yet despair; let us review his reasoning; all this may possibly be his own mistake. In regard to inspiration, his argument carries no further weight than to prove, we cannot receive it for inspiration barely on the word of the person who lays pretensions to it, but must have external proof suitable thereto. I have said *suitable*, for we acknowledge it is no mean proof that will do the business; for the claim being both of a spiritual kind, and supernatural too, it was of course out of the reach of our senses to discover it, or of our bare reason to distinguish the reality and certainty of it; therefore, God's own evidence, to his own word, became necessary; and this must be by some such operations as ourselves might be proper judges of, and which should exceed the course and laws of nature, and so be possible only to God; or if we suppose them

P. 171, 172.

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done by the instrumentality of angels, still only under his empowering command and direction, and carrying his stamp and authority upon them. Now such were the acts performed in attestation to the truth of inspiration, by which the apostles, and some others, had the grand doctrines and scheme of the gospel imparted to them, to be preached by them, and published to the world. And these acts were objects of men's senses, done in the face of the world; clearly and assuredly exceeded all human powers; were performed in contradiction to the course of nature, and declared by those that did them, to be done in evidence that what they preached was communicated to them by revelation from God. Inspiration thus attested, one would think, could not but be true, must come from God, and so be infallible; otherwise we must suppose God to lay snares to entrap his creatures, to lead them into such circumstances that if they act as reason, and piety, and a confidence in the power and wisdom and goodness of God dictate, they must believe, and follow a lie; this is such a complication of weakness, injustice, and cruelty, that it is much easier to disbelieve the being of God, than even to believe the possibility of his acting thus. And yet, strong as this proof is, it is not thought sufficient, "for we understand not the nature of miracles, or when a thing is such; we may be deceived in this case, by beings of superior orders."

orders." The subject of miracles hath been often and accurately handled, to the full vindication of Christianity, in this particular branch of it's evidence: What I have to add here, is to make an appeal to *common* sense; and if there be any man who knows not what he may believe to be a true assured miracle, a plain honest man in the gospel will tell him*. When the Pharisees were in consultation to destroy the credit of a miracle, which our Saviour had performed on a man born blind; and to this end were plying him with insnaring questions to make him deny or defeat the thing, this artless expostulation of the man upon their unbelief baffles all their cavils; "why herein is a marvellous thing, that ye know not whence he (that is, Jesus) is, and yet he hath opened my eyes." There needed no metaphysical speculation to confirm the miracle; it was notorious he was born blind, and never saw light up to his manhood; the case was such, as the poor man argues, that it was ever deemed incurable; "Since the world began was it not heard, that any man opened the eyes of one that was born blind." ver. 32. No other guide but self-taught reason was necessary here; the miracle spoke itself, and the Jews found nothing to return in reply, but a load of reproaches and

* John ix.

abuse. The justness of these sentiments have the fullest confirmation from the repeated declarations of our blessed Saviour. In the fifth chapter of St John, ver. 36. he tells the Jews, who would not believe his mission, "that the works which he did, bore witness of him, that the Father had sent him." and in the tenth chapter, 38th verse, he exhorts them, "although they believed not him" (on account of his own testimony) "yet to believe his works;" that is, to believe them to be, what they really and evidently were, the works of God; the consequence of which would be, a belief that he came from, and was commissioned by, God. And in like manner as the Father sent him, so he sent his apostles, empowered with the like credentials; with the promise of the spirit of truth, to guide them into all truth, and to teach them all things^t; with an assurance, that in their apologies, or defences, before kings and magistrates, they would not need to be solicitous^u, or premeditate, "for it should be given them what they should speak;" or, as it is elsewhere expressed, "They should have a mouth, and wisdom given them, which all their adversaries should not be able to gainsay, or resist." And the great end or purpose for which all this supernatural assistance, or inspiration,

^t Joh. xvi. 13. xiv. 26.

^u Lu. xii. 11. *μη μελεῖτε*. Mat. x. 19. Lu. xxi. 15.

was granted, is no less plainly indicated. St. Mark, after relating Christ's commission to his apostles, to preach the gospel, and specifying fundry miracles, engaged by him to ensure the credit and success of it, concludes with telling us, "They went and preached every where, the Lord working with them, and confirming the word with signs following*." Or, as the author of the epistle to the Hebrews denotes the thing, "God also bearing them witness, both with signs and wonders, and with divers miracles, and gifts of the Holy Ghost*." The conclusion of all this is, either miracles are sufficient credentials, or our Saviour deceived his apostles; and consequently either inspiration, in confirmation of the truth of which miracles were performed, is true, or Christianity itself must be false. I have been so particular in stating this point, as Christianity can never stand on that narrow bottom, upon which the author of the Free Inquiry would fix it, according to whom what evidence it hath may altogether render it more or less probable, but can never amount to certain proof: Now itself lays claim to certain proof; demands the firmest and assured belief; delivers as it's distinguishing characteristick, and the foundation of all, *the truth of the redemption*, which was preached to the world, by persons specially inspired for

* Mark xvi. 20.

* Heb. ii. 4.

the purpose, and invincibly attested by a series of miracles; deny these, and you make Christianity falsify itself; and tho' you carry the rest as high as you please, it is no longer a revelation, but a frail compound system of truth and falsehood, and what, as being such, could not possibly come from God. But the author, we may be told, hath still an argument safe and sound; for be it that this inspiration and these miracles were at first sufficiently authenticated, yet to us it is only matter of history, and the author cannot pin his faith on such evidence. "We cannot," he says, "be assured of the divine authority of a revelation; thro' the fallacious medium of history, which must be ever liable to infinite imperfections; we can never be certain, that the writers of it, being men, were not imposed upon themselves, or did not intend to impose on others, and therefore it's original evidence cannot be conclusive, but must daily grow weaker in proportion to it's antiquity; it must necessarily be subject to all uncertainties proceeding from the variation of languages and customs, ignorant transcribers, false translations, interpolations, and forgeries." To all which he adds, that, "as the histories of religions are more connected with men's inter-

† P. 171, 172, 173.

* This argument is in part contracted, to avoid prolixity.

ests than other occurrences, they must ever be more subject to such frauds and impositions." Thus, after discrediting history in general, he makes the faith of gospel history more precarious and uncertain than all the rest.

It will be necessary to examine the several parts of this accumulated charge separately; and therefore after making a general observation or two applicable to all, I shall give to each article a particular consideration. In the first place then, I desire to remark, that the question betwixt us and the Inquirer, proceeds not on the *απαμάρτυσια*, as it is called, or absolute perfection, clear of all the least mistakes, or defects, in our present copies. The various readings in the several manuscripts shew the absurdity of such a supposition, unless the persons who made the choice could be supposed to have been themselves inspired. Some such errors as are common to all Books, may and must be granted; and yet little or no change of moment to the whole is effected thereby. What we are enquiring about is such a general alteration as must shew Christianity a very different and inconsistent thing, and thereby destroy the credibility and authority of it; or in other words, it is whether we can have any well-grounded assurance that nothing hath happened to our books, of such nature or in such degree, but that we may be rationally certain, we have our religion pure

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and uncorrupted, as it was delivered by the apostles. Another thing to be remarked upon this imputation of uncertainty is, that the matter in question is assumed upon the bare presumption that it must happen of course from the nature of the thing; that chance or fraud in so many centuries could not but introduce such changes and corruptions, that we cannot know what we may certainly depend upon; whereas the resolution of the question standing on facts, whether any or what kind of changes or corruptions were introduced, his assertion ought at least to have been verified by some instances from history, since serious and rational men will be apt to think it incomparably less probable such changes and falsifications could have prevailed without much violent commotion and dispute, and which could not have escaped the special notice of ecclesiastical writers, than that, considering the difficulty and hazard of success, they should ever have been attempted at all. But the author we are concerned with, hath, with better judgment than some others that went before him, avoided entering into such disquisition, tho' his argument is much baulked by his declining it; for he certainly knew no instance that would bear the examining. He had seen the ill success of a gentleman of no mean figure amongst his friends, in attempting it, and the severe, tho' just correction he met with from the late learned Dr. Bentley, on the occasion;

tion^a; and therefore left his argument to shift for itself. Yet altho' he is defective in so material a part of evidence, yet he has plenty of reasons from the nature of the thing. And the first of these is the *variation of languages*; a reason most unlucky for the author, as it hath been the peculiar advantage of the Greek tongue, to suffer very little change thro' a much longer succession of ages than can be affirmed of any other European language. From Homer to the times of writing the books of the gospel, there were, according to the common reckoning of chronologers, more than one thousand years; or, if we take the shortest account, which is that of Sir Isaac Newton, betwixt eight and nine hundred; and yet, if we compare Homer's works, and those of a succession of eminent authors, of which there are many down to the very times of the apostles, we shall find the language to continue the same, with no greater difference than what may be seen in different writers of the same age, in the same language, and same country. And as the language was preserved in full glory, thro' such a series of years before the gospel, so it lived, yet gradually declining in splendour and beauty, for as many centuries after; till Turkish devastation at once put an end to the empire of the Greeks, and thro' their proud tyranny, and the quite

^a See Philol. Lips. § 33.

broken spirits of the wretched people, completed the ruin of what hath been deemed the finest language in the world, but now debased into a corrupt mongrel tongue, called modern Greek. Is then, together with this change of the New Testament language, the meaning of it's contents, or the certainty of it's history, lost or impaired? nothing less. The numerous Greek writings, by the most approved authors, before, and in, and after the age of the books of Christianity, fix the sense of the language beyond doubt; to these we appeal as to a just test, for the purport and significance of it, with the same certainty as might be done in the apostolical times; and whilst Homer, and Xenophon, and Demosthenes, with many others in the ancients times, and Josephus, and Plutarch, &c. in the later, are read and understood, it is impossible the language of the Greek Testament should become vague and uncertain, unmeaning or insignificant. Particular difficulties may arise from the nature of the subject; but mere language, or the fluctuating nature of it, are not to answer for it, they are owing to the newness or greatness of the matters treated of, and wanted to be explained when it was a living language as well as now. It is true, we have sometimes much stress laid on it's Hebraisms, and some tho' rarer foreign forms; and yet learned men, upon cooler examination, are generally satisfied, that even the Hebraisms

isms are nothing near so many as they have sometimes been imagined. Reason and common sense may well be supposed sufficient to lead people of different tongues to use the same metaphor, or figure of speech, taken from objects common to all, without borrowing one from the other.—The learned Mr. Blackwall, who had very particularly inquired into this matter, was persuaded, “that as good a regard has been had, in the New Testament, to the general analogy and propriety of grammar, as in the greatest and sublimest writings which make up the standard of the Greek language^b” What foreign idioms there are, instead of confounding or obscuring the text, they do in many places most fitly and strongly express the thing intended; in many others, they add beauty and grace to it. Difference, or change of customs, are somewhat more justly alledged; and yet there is very little of this kind, that learned men have not got a competent knowledge of, from other books and helps: however it is not denied, but that some usages long laid aside, or allusions to facts and events now unknown, may, after all, elude the scrutiny of the most skilful; yet these will be found either to be in matters that might peculiarly concern the times when the writing was penned; and the allusion easily understood, and so useful to all who were interested

^b Sacred Classics, p. 170. vol. i.

in knowing it; but of no consequence to us who do not understand it: or if it be relative to general duty, what is obscure or ambiguous in one place, is plain and clear in another; or, what is oftner the case, these allusions are matters of curiosity only, or mere learned inquiry, perhaps but a phrase, or a word; such as it cannot hurt us to be ignorant of at this time, nor be either any impediment to us in the knowledge of our duty, or any discouragement in the performance of it. However it fare with such incidental allusions, Christianity is the same, the rule of faith and manners the same, clear of any such doubt or obscurity, as might speak it to be, what it is sometimes represented to be, vague, uncertain, and precarious.

Ignorance of transcribers is another of the Inquirer's articles, but will be more properly considered by and by. False translations take the next rank in the list; admitting the fact in some instances, still we have the originals to recur to; the remedy is at hand to all learned men, and the fault is their own if they will not apply it. As to persons unequal to such inquiry, there is all the reason in the world they should acquiesce in the general agreement of men of skill and probity that know better. And yet the defects of translations will be found to lie rarely in any thing more than want of beauty or elegance, and in their sinking beneath the dignity or strength

strength of the original; and in such things it will be allowed, doctrine or manners have little concern. But we will suppose the mistake to happen in passages of much higher or moral importance, and in places too where the original itself may not be very clear, at once to set it right; still, as we have observed in a like case, there are numerous other passages where the same duties are enjoined, and translated too in so strong and express terms, that it is impossible for men to mistake them, if they do not wilfully blindfold themselves. We may therefore, I apprehend, safely rest the matter here; when any out of the numerous translations that have been made (almost as numerous as the languages in the ancient world) can be produced, that shall shew Christianity so mangled and changed in its substance, as to become another thing, or not afford such a system of doctrine and morals as men may be saved by, the objection will then demand a further answer; 'till this is shewn, the cry of false translations must be regarded as mere invidious artifice and chicanery.

The last of the four principal articles alleged, are interpolations and forgeries. These indeed strike at foundations; but sure the greater the consequence, the stronger ought the proof to be, nor can a serious man think it sufficient for the Inquirer to say here, that in the nature of the thing it *must* be; it is in-

cumbent upon him to shew that it hath been, which it cannot be difficult to do, if they must here have happened of course from the nature of man, and the practicableness of the thing. But there were, on the other hand, circumstances so very extraordinary all along attending these writings, that it seems next to an impossibility, any considerable forgeries or interpolations should be intruded into them, without such detection as must defeat the design. The wide and rapid progress of the gospel, thro' the vast extent of the Roman empire, and in many parts beyond it, could not but occasion an early dispersion of the genuine and acknowledged accounts of Christ, and his religion, written by the apostles, and their coadjutors. No adversary is so absurd as to suppose an immediate falsification; the very objection here proceeds on a supposition of a course of time to effect it in: After then, copies were got into many hands, and in countries widely distant, a general combination in any falsifying is totally incredible; and as to particulars attempting it, the corruption could only affect the fewer copies they had opportunity of practising upon; the rest would bear witness against them, and the fraud be rejected with abhorrence. That this must have been the case, we have every reason to believe. The very importance of the books, valued by the wisest and best men of the age beyond their lives, would make them jealous of

of any attempt to alter or corrupt them^c. The heresies that were so frequently broached by vain and ambitious men, could not fail to heighten such jealousy? and the infinite impiety and lewdness of those heresies would still further quicken their care and vigilance against all foul dealing. The circumstance of these sacred writings being much more closely studied, their being constantly read, both at their private family prayers, and especially in their public assemblies; all this cannot be considered as less than a perpetual guard and sentry over them. In such case, to say any very considerable corruptions may be supposed

* It is well known that the greatest infamy, next to downright apostasy, that Christians could incur, and what in the discipline of the primitive times was to be avoided, tho' at the price of life, was the delivering up the Scriptures to be burnt or abused by their persecutors. With such a turn and sense of things it is natural to suppose, they would be uncommonly solicitous to preserve the autographa, or originals, of the sacred books; and these, we are assured, were kept with the utmost reverence for some ages, by the churches to whom they were sent, or where they were wrote. Tertullian urges this argument with great justice and spirit: "Age jam qui voles curiositatem melius exercere in negotio salutis tuæ, percurre ecclesias apostolicas, apud quas ipsæ adhuc cathedræ apostolorum suis locis præsent, apud quas ipsæ authenticæ literæ eorum recitantur sonantes vocem, & representantes faciem Iuniusculique. Proxima est tibi Achaia? habes Corinthum. Si non longè es a Macedonia, habes Philippos, habes Thesalonicensis. Si potes in Asiam tendere, habes Ephesum. Si autem Italiae adjaces, habes Romam, unde nobis quoque auctoritas est. De præscrip. Hær. c. 36. p. 245.

Ed. Lutet. 1634.

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to be overlooked, or after being known not to be zealously opposed, is as much as to say, the best, the bravest, and the wisest of men, could be inattentive to the honour of God, and the welfare of their own souls; and tamely sit still and see all that their virtue and happiness depended upon, snatched out of their hands. Should we suppose a corruption in a few instances to have got into some Greek copies, yet a change in one language could make no alteration in another; and these very translations, together with the more numerous uncorrupted Greek copies, would come in evidence against the innovation. Idle spurious gospels, and other pretended sacred writings, appeared betimes; but they carried a quite different face, and generally a different name too, from the genuine gospels, the mangling or falsifying of which was so rarely attempted, at least carried to effect in any considerable degree, that about the middle of the third century, Origen declares, in answer to his adversary, who had alledged some Christians took all kind of liberties to change the gospel *ἐκ τῆς πρώτης γράφης*, from what was first written, that he knew none who had changed it but the Marcionites, Valentinians

^d Μεταχαραξάσας το Ευαγγέλιον άλλης ἐκ οὐδα ἢ τῆς ἀπο Μαρκίωνος, καὶ τῆς ἀπο Οὐαλεντίνου, οἵμαί τε τῆς ἀπο Λεξιανῆ. Orig. con. Cels. lib. ii. p. 77. ed. spen. Epiphanius (Hær. 43.) gives the name of the last Λεξιανός, which is the more probable reading, as his followers are constantly

lentinians, and Lucianists^d. That Marcion himself is principally intended under the first of these is beyond all doubt, as he was the most notorious falsifier of the sacred books, and published, for a rule to his followers, what he called the Gospel of St. Luke, and an Apostolicon; so that the *οἱ ἀπὸ Μαρκίων* here denote the followers of Marcion, rather as adhering to the adulterated books of their master, than

constantly denominated Lucianistæ. There were, indeed, sundry other and earlier narratives of Christ's life and doctrine, prior even to the writing of St. Luke's Gospel (see c. i. ver. 1.) but from his manner of expressing himself about them, we may presume, however defective they might be, they were in the main, faithful accounts, neither forgeries, nor sophistications of any authenticated gospel; but being compiled by uninspired, tho' well-meaning Christians from traditional materials, were considered only as ecclesiastical books, and never taken into the canon. In the number of these some very learned men have not scrupled to rank the gospel according to the Hebrews, and another according to the Egyptians. In what credit they stood amongst the ancient Christians, we may judge from Clem. Alex. who refuting some false notions concerning continence, and which the gospel of the Egyptians was pleaded in support of, answers, 1st, in abatement of the authority of that gospel, that there was no account of such matter as was pleaded from it by his adversary, in any of the four gospels, delivered down to them. *Εν τοῖς παραδιδόμενοις ἡμῖν τεταρσιν Ευαγγελίοις οὐκ ἔχομεν τὸ εἶλον, ἀλλ' ἐν τῷ κατ' Αἰγυπτίους.* Clem. Alex. Strom. lib. iii. § 13. p. 553. Vide item § 9. And then, 2dly, that the passage had a sound meaning, and would support no such doctrine as it was produced for. The same author, in Strom. lib. ii. § 9. p. 453. quotes the gospel according to the Hebrews with approbation.

as authors of them. But this Gospel of his, which he would screen under the authority of an acknowledged evangelist, was so shamefully contradictory to the great name it boasted, so many things were added, so many altered, so many struck out, that when it once ceased to be a secret, and was got further than the hands of his own disciples, it could not but be discovered to be a vamped-up thing, to serve a turn. Correspondent to this was his Apostolicon, made up of scraps and mangled parts of ten of St. Paul's epistles; the rest of the books of the New Testament, and the whole of the old, being rejected by him. And what was the event of this daring impiety? The vigilance and integrity of the pastors of the church very soon laid the whole open to the world. The ablest and best men of their several times, Justin Martyr^e, Irenæus, Clemens Alexandrinus, Tertullian, Origen, all of them, and in a continued succession, set themselves to expose the absurdity and blasphemy of the man's principles, for the support of which his forgeries and mutilations of scripture were contrived by him^f. Some of them, in their books now remaining, have, with the utmost detestation, taken notice of this villanous attempt of his, to put off his

^e Pag. 43. Ed. Thirl. vide item p. 85. and Dial. cum Try. p. 208.

^f Vide Grabii Spicel. § 2. p. 166.

falsified scriptures for the only genuine ones; and the rest either professed they had, in some other work, more particularly discussed his impieties, or engaged so to do. It would be thought strange, if, when we are calling in authorities on this subject, Epiphanius should be overlooked, who, tho' later in time, yet has more minutely considered Marcion's scriptural sophistications, and extracted a greater number of passages out of his Gospel and Apostolicon, than are to be met with, but thro' him, in any other book now extant. Here we have enough to convince the world of the man's fraud and knavery. And yet, in what is quoted, we are not to expect to find the more glaring expressions of his blasphemy and impiety (it being beside the aim of Epiphanius to produce such passages as Marcion had changed and corrupted, to become subservient to his own wicked purposes); but such chiefly as he had ignorantly, or inadvertently admitted from the genuine books into his own, tho' they utterly overturned his great doctrines; and this way to confute him out of his own scriptures*. I have mentioned these authorities for the sake of shewing the care and zeal of the church to preserve the sacred depositum of the Holy Scripture pure and intaminate, and to guard it's members against the fatal effects of sacrilegious or adulterating hands; and they could not but be sufficient

* Epiphan. Hær. xlii. § 9, &c.

to answer this end, on all that were not both slaves to their passions and lusts, and resolved at the same time, and at all events, to plead principle for it.

From Marcion, to whom Origen gave the first rank, on account, I presume, of his bolder attempts in the case before us, let us go a little back to Valentinus; who, tho' a man inexpressibly infamous, and that wrote books of the most poisonous nature, yet ventured not on direct and immediate changing of the sacred writings^b. His method was less daring; yet with ignorant or ill-disposed minds, led to the depths of impurity and blasphemy. Epiphanius has given a large, and very valuable extract from Irenæus, which had otherwise been lost to the world; in which extract we have this method very accurately described; "The Valentinians," he says, "deprave the Scripture, turning and transforming it to support their own doctrine; and collecting words and sentences that lie scattered in different places in Scripture, artfully apply and change them from their natural, to an unnatural sense." This is illu-

^b See Grabe's *Spicilegium*, sec. ii. p. 49. where he has shewn from Irenæus and Tertullian, that Valentinus did not himself write any fictitious gospel, tho' his followers gave out one under the title of the Gospel of truth. But this was not a canonical book falsified, but a book of their own devising. Irenæus treats it as a novel, blasphemous thing.

trated in the same place from the Homercantones, in which are patched-up stories, in verses picked up out of various parts of the Iliad and Odysey, by which management Homer's own verses speak a matter that Homer never thought of, and yet might be put off on many who had but an imperfect knowledge of that poet's writings, as really his¹. In some such way as this, by taking parts of Scripture separately, and applying them to things very different from what they were applied to in their own proper places and connections, arguments are framed, and inferences deduced from Scripture, for doctrines the very reverse to what it teaches. A short instance of their wildness in interpreting Scripture, may not be unacceptable to some people who have not the accounts to recur to. It shall be given below and may be either read, or overlooked, as the reader is disposed^k. Our Scripture therefore was safe, as
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¹ See Epiphan. in Valentin. Hær. 31. p. 200. or in Iren. lib. 1. ch. i. p. 43. whither this extract is now justly transferred from him to it's own place.

^k They were taught to receive, as an article of their faith, a race of æons, or gods, made up of males and females, thirty in number; one of whom they named Bythos, the progenitor of the rest; but all in conjunction constituting the Pleroma, the fulness of the divinity. So strange a principle might well be supposed to need some proof; and they boasted of having it; not, we are to suppose, from so polluted a fountain as Pagan Theogony (tho' it is plain they had no better), but from no less an
authority

to any thing done by Valentinians: their impious and forced distortions of it's sense might occasion Origen to consider it as one kind of falsification; yet, strictly speaking, in point of changing or altering, they did little or nothing of this, but left the book as they found it.

Let us go on then to Lucanus, the last of the three mentioned by Origen, but with more reserve than the other two; οἶμαι δὲ τὰς ἀπὸ Λυκανῶν, are his words, as much as if he had said, I think too those of Lucanus (or Lucianus) and his followers; plainly implying that he said this not upon a certainty, but that he believed it to be so. He gives not his reasons, but the case seems to have been thus; Lucianus was a disciple of Marcion, and yet upon some occasion dividing from him, ga-

authority than that of St. Paul, who, they pretend, most evidently and often speaks of these æons; and particularly in Ephes. iii. 21. keeps up the order of them in these words, εἰς πᾶσας τὰς γενεὰς τῶν αἰώνων τῶν αἰώνων, Παυλοῦ φανερωτάτα λεγέσθαι τῆς αἰῶνος ὀνομαζέσθαι πολλὰς, ἐπὶ δὲ καὶ τὴν τάξιν αὐτῶν τετήρηκεν αἵτως ἐπὶ οὐλᾷ, εἰς πᾶσας τὰς γενεὰς τῶν αἰώνων τῶν αἰώνων, or rather, as Dr. Grabe would read, and upon the strongest reasons, αἰώνων τῶν αἰώνων, where their sagacity, it seems, discovers, under Αἰώνων, in the singular number, a clear attestation to the first æon, the Αἰὼν τέλει, προπατορ; and under Αἰώνων in the plural, the like testimony to the rest, who, according to their genealogies, were descended from him.—I have given this as their top-proof; it were easy to produce more of their absurdities, but one example of such trash is sufficient.

thered

thered followers after himself, under the name of Lucianists, but, according to Epiphanius, dogmatizing in every thing with Marcion¹. His falsified Scriptures therefore, must have been in the main the same with Marcion's; and altho' the testimony of Origen leaves no room to doubt, that Lucianus made some further changes or additions to those of the Marcionites, yet we find the distinction of Lucianists continued but a very short time, which was probably owing to the very little difference betwixt the two, which made it easy for the latter, to fall in again with their old friends, and drop their new name for their first, and more eminent one, of Marcionite. Their own Scripture corruptions would find no difficulty to gain admission with them, amongst men familiarized to such impostures, and soon be blended with the rest, so as not to be separated, or distinguished from the other. And this way, I apprehend, accounts both for the silence of the fathers in relation to the Lucianist adulterations, and also for the reserved manner in which Origen speaks of them. In this state they would continue to share the same fortune undistinguished, whilst Marcionitism held up it's head, but all the while exploded by every wise and good man, and, at length, totally lost, and buried in the

¹ Κατὰ τὰς κατὰ τὴν Μαρκίωνα δόξαν. Epiph. Hær. 43. § 1.

same contempt together. These three then are the forgers and interpolators, on whom the Free Inquirer, if he would argue here from facts, and not presume only from the pretended nature and reason of the thing, which is utterly denied, and can be proved only by facts, must ground his impeachment; besides these, no man, or body of men, in the ancient times (unless we are to give up history, and take mere imagination for our guide) can be supposed to have done any thing to effect such change in the gospel books, as could either destroy the essence of Christianity, or shake it's authenticity. And even of those above-named, we have shewn, that taking the charge in the sense which the Free-inquirer intended, one of them is excluded. For tho' the Valentinians wrote a fictitious gospel, yet even their polluted hands spared the genuine ones^m. What Lucianus's corruptions were, we have no account, and the reason appears from what hath been said before, they were soon confounded with those of the Marcionites. Only in the Gospel of the latter, and the Apostolicon, was to be found any thing that could come up to the Inquirer's purpose, thro' the first ages, so low as the time of Epiphanius, who reached the beginning of the fifth century. But is there not room to think something of that kind might be done after?

^m Irenæus, lib. iii. ch. 11. p. 224.

Were not men themselves grown corrupter? might they not be little scrupulous of corrupting Scripture too? might they not even fail in their care to watch over it? Thus much is acknowledged, their love, their purity, their heavenly-mindedness, was fallen greatly short of that of the first Christians. But as we may still see amongst ourselves, their zeal for the Scriptures was not abated; justly contending, as we do, for their books, and to preserve them pure and inviolate; yet often too regardless to form our lives according to them. The difficulties also of executing any scheme of alteration had increased upon them: Christianity had been daily growing and enlarging its boundaries; the consequence of which was the multiplying the copies of the gospel books, and the gaining fresh witnesses to the contents of them; so that a general corruption became more and more impossible; nor is there so much as a vestige remaining of any such attempt, as a new forming or moulding of Scripture; for as to the pretence founded on a passage in Victor's Chronicon, this cannot now deserve any thing more than contempt, after Dr. Bentley has so thoroughly exposed the vanity and impertinence of it. If ever a time was favourable for such an attempt, that perhaps may seem to be it, when a long inglorious night of dulness and igno-

* Phileleuth. Lip. Let. l. p. 79.

rance prevailed for ages, when at the same time numerous and flagrant corruptions were introduced into the church, that needed all the authority and support they could have given to them, and the tyranny of popes lorded it over the faith and consciences of men; and yet as much as all these circumstances seemed to threaten, there were still, on the other hand, difficulties insuperable, had any such thing been attempted: And therefore Papal policy took a very different turn for the support of it's pretensions; which was not by venturing to alter and new model the Scripture, but keeping men, as much as might be, in ignorance of the sense of it, discouraging the study of all good learning, inventing reasons for removing the Sacred Books out of the hands of one sort of men, putting off false glosses and comments on others, and racking and torturing it every way to favour their own corruptions, and make the Pope an infallible interpreter. To all which was added an higher piece of refinement; a new way of reasoning upon it was artfully introduced and encouraged; Aristotle was set up to interpret St. Paul; quaint distinctions supplied the place of reasons; and he stood a fair chance to come off with victory, who was least understood. By these, and other artifices, they triumphed over Scripture, even whilst they retained and pleaded it. Whereas, had they attempted to carry their point by falsifications, framing
Scripture

Scripture anew, to answer their principles and practice, the cheat was too bare-faced and shocking not to have created an alarm, that must have ended in their confusion; for in the darkest and most corrupt of those times, there still were not wanting, amongst their numerous religious orders and houses where the Sacred Books were open to them, some wise and good men, able to detect such a fraud, and honest enough to abhor and defeat it. It is indeed acknowledged, that of learned men, masters of the originals, there were not then persons so qualified in many places. Their copies therefore of this higher class, for the greater part, slept quiet in their libraries, and themselves rarely looked further than the Latin version, which had with *them* the reverence, and with very many the authority, of the original; so that if any one or more men able to corrupt and falsify the originals had actually done it, it had yet been to no purpose, without making correspondent changes in that version, which, considering the numerous hands and the different countries it was spread into, was impossible to be done by any private fraud; and that it was not done by general combination, or by public appointment, is absolutely certain. It is well known, that the struggles for pre-eminence betwixt the Greek and Latin churches, sowed very early the seeds of a strong jealousy in each towards the other; and this, exasperated by some dis-

ferences of opinion, ended at length in an actual rupture, and breach of communion, which never was healed; so that here again, under such circumstances, it became impossible that the canonical books, common to both, should be adulterated with forgeries and interpolations by mutual compact or covenant betwixt them; and no less impossible it should have been done on one side without being contradicted and exposed by the books of the other. When therefore learning had raised it's head, and reformation shaken off the fetters of papacy, Libraries were set open, Manuscripts in the original languages were sought with all assiduity, and examined with all care and fidelity. The east hath added to the treasures of the west, and communicated copies of so remote antiquity as to be far prior in time to the schism betwixt the Latin and Greek churches. Our MSS have been compared with theirs, and the Latin version with both; and lo! all is safe: Even Papal forgeries have stood aloof from this *holy ground*. There are, of course, accidental slips and errors in transcribing, but Christianity is the same in all; and they mutually authenticate, and, after making reasonable allowances for mistakes arising from the nature of the thing, and common to all written books whatever, prove the faith and purity of each other. This last argument leads to another, that seems to exclude all the least suspicion of a
considerable

considerable change; for if either the Greeks or Latins falsified their Scriptures, it must have been with a view to cover or defend their own tenets or practices. The many and great corruptions in the Latin church every one knows; the corruptions in the Greek were many and great too. They had vehement disputes with each other also. Yet we find no interpolations to justify and authorise their corruptions; no defalcation of passages that refute and condemn them; nothing done to give one party advantage against the other; but the books of both alike condemn the errors of both. And how is this to be accounted for but from hence, that they were not corrupted by either? for would any man, or number of men, set to alter them in places where themselves had little or no concern, and yet leave others untouched, which their principles, their honour, their interests, were most highly concerned to have changed?

Having proceeded so far on the article of want of authenticity, I flattered myself I had taken in, not only what the Inquirer seemed more immediately to have his eye upon, but all the considerable branches to which the objection might be extended; yet upon a review, two other matters of exception occurred to me, which I have sometimes known a great stress to be laid upon, and which, tho' already in part obviated, yet will be thought by some men, to deserve a particular consideration. The first of these is, that the

state of books in the days of the apostles, was very different from what we see since the invention of printing; that they were at that time procured with difficulty at a great price, and consequently could have been in the hands of very few, which, they think, defeats all arguments from the multitude of copies. The mistake of this objection, if it doth not deserve an harsher name, lies in judging from the pomp of MSS now remaining, saved out of the almost general wreck of savage wars and persecutions; and their preservation they might in some measure owe to this their beauty and elegance. The lovers of them would of course endeavour most to save the best, and possibly even the fairness and excellence of the writing, might sometimes prevail on barbarity itself to spare the copy. These then are not patterns to estimate the rest by, but were works of labour, time, and cost, and written for the use of great men, or the service of the church. But in the general, the thirst of the first Christians after the knowledge of their Divine master, and their own infinite interests, waited for no such apparatus: Common copies, easily procured, and at a much smaller expence, would answer their ends.—The goodness of God had, at the first preaching of the gospel, granted such plentiful effusions and lights of the Holy Spirit, as were sufficient by oral teaching for the church; and when written accounts became expedient or necessary, the

the divine wisdom saw fit, that it should not be done all at once, but in separate parts, and by degrees, interposing proper intervals betwixt the publication of each of the Gospels, and thus graciously suiting the whole to their understandings, and their convenience. In this way, the books being short, they had abundant leisure to transcribe each, as they severally came to hand; or if they chose rather to have others to do it for them, there were every where men, whose business it was to copy books, and who could suit their labour, their materials, and the expence, to the liking of those who employed them. And can we doubt that the zeal and love of the first Christians would here be wanting; that they who esteemed their everlasting concerns as wrapped up in Christianity, would grudge either this small labour of their own, or so trifling expence laid out with others, for the great charter of their happiness, the truth of which they were so thoroughly convinced of, and were constantly ready to die in attestation to it?

The next objection threatens still greater things: We receive, it is pretended, we know not what; we cannot tell who collected and put together the books of the New Testament, and are as little acquainted, when or how the canon was fixed: There were many other accounts, or histories of the same subject;

ject^o; and the unknown persons who made the choice might, for aught we can say to the contrary, be warped by fancies, or corrupt aims of their own, and so would select only such as most favoured themselves. This argument, with what assurance soever urged, will be found, when coolly considered, to dwindle into nothing.—St. John lived till the year of Christ 101; during his time there was no danger of any spurious or false books being publickly taken by the church into the number of inspired writings; he was at hand, and for many years before his death, lived either in exile at Patmos, or in the highest distinction at Ephesus; both which places are nearly in the center between the Asiatic, European, and African churches, and where he must of course have been applied to in so great an affair, and his judgment was incontestable. Three of the Gospels had been long received in his time; and were, according to the tradition of the church, reviewed by him, a thing in itself beyond all doubt, it being absurd to suppose, that either his care for the churches should neglect to do it, or that his own engaging in a work of the same kind, should not lead him to it. Indeed his own gospel evidently proves it, being plainly calculated to give us some account of those parts of our

• Vide note to page 236.

Saviour's ministry, which the other evangelists had either not at all, or but slightly touched upon; particularly in the first period of it, before the death of the Baptist; and again in those incomparably moving discourses delivered by him to his disciples, a little before his own last sufferings.—That St. John then was acquainted with these Gospels, we have the fullest assurance from the nature of the thing, from the select matter of his own gospel, and the testimony of the church, which is the utmost evidence the case admits of; and if he saw them, we agree likewise with what the same tradition adds, that he approved, and bore testimony to the truth of them; and for our concurrence herein, we have this strong reason, that his own doctrine, his own history, is in no respect repugnant, but entirely consonant with theirs. This was his last and dying work, and by it the Gospel history was now full and completed. Dr. Bentley expresses himself on this occasion, as if speedily after this the church had, by some formal act, fixed the evangelical canon: His words are, “nor did the church loiter and delay in making a canon or collection of them (*the Gospel books*); for within two years after the writing of St. John's Gospel, the evangelical canon was fixed; and within ten after

Euseb. Eccles. hist. lib. iii. c. 24.

Phil. Lips. § 31.

that

that, an epistolical canon was made; quick enough, if it be considered that they were to be gathered (whither they had been directed) from so many, and so distant parts of the world." The Doctor, we see, precisely fixes the time, tho' he staid not to shew the grounds on which he formed his opinion. He had, no doubt, some reasons for what he said, and I can only lament that he did not tell us them^r. However it is not so much the specialty

^r There are learned men, as particularly Dr. Jenkin, (in his Reasonableness of the Christian religion, vol. ii. p. 118.) who make no doubt of St. John's settling, as well as finishing the canon of Scripture; and he argues from the thing's being highly worthy of his care, and of mighty moment to the good of the church. We grant every thing of this but the conclusion he draws from it, which certainly doth not follow; so far indeed we may assuredly infer that St. John specially revised the Gospel, or New Testament books, and that he recommended them for the infallible rule of faith and manners to the church. For every one of St. Paul's epistles were sent to persons, or churches, from whence they might without any great difficulty be communicated to him. The first epistle of St. Peter, and that of St. James, were inscribed to the twelve tribes; great numbers of these were in Asia Minor, where St. John's apostolical province principally lay, and in which he had taken up his residence at Ephesus. All these had a particular concern in the epistles, and this could not be unknown to St. John. The second of St. Peter, and that of St. Jude, were directed to all converts, so that in these also they had, at least, a general concern; and his office, as their apostle and father, must here too occasion his being acquainted with them. His knowledge of the three former Gospels hath been shewn above; and

cialty of the time, as the assuredness of the thing that we are concerned about; and we have such attestations, from a continual uninterrupted succession of men perfectly acquainted with the thing, and so superior to all fraud or falsity, that the case will not permit a reasonable man to believe there was any thing wanting to give a due authenticity to the books we receive for the code or canon of the New Testament, or so much as to make it a doubt, whether their Scriptures and ours were the same. The fathers, from the time we have already brought down this matter to, that is to say, to the death of St. John, are continually referring or making appeals to it; and, upon the justest comparison, the books and the matter contained in them do perfectly accord with our own. St. Clement of Rome,

and all the rest of the books were wrote by himself. And yet even all that comes not up to what is understood by Settling the canon, by which is ever meant a public act, an act of notoriety, at least some rescript declarative of his judgment, and giving sanction and authority to the same. But where do we read of any council, or synod, held under him for this purpose, or hear of any rescript published by him relative to this matter? Ignatius, whom himself made bishop of Antioch, and who must have attended on such solemn occasion, gives not the least hint of it; nor doth Polycarp his disciple, nor the fathers that come after, mention any such thing; from which silence of theirs, the very least that can be concluded is, that if it will not be admitted as proof that there was no such thing done, it is however quite sufficient against any presumption that there was.

who

who was cotemporary with the apostles, and probably the same Clement whom St. Paul styles his fellow-labourer, wrote an epistle to the Romans, of great esteem in the church, and which is still preserved: Ignatius also, who, for his rare goodness and piety, was, by the apostles themselves, appointed bishop of Antioch, and suffered martyrdom about five years after the death of St. John, wrote epistles to the neighbouring churches. In these epistles, as in that of St. Clement, we have variety of passages from the evangelical and epistolary books agreeing with our own, and which, in confirmation of their doctrine, they urge as the received word of God. To these authorities we add that of Polycarp, another apostolical man, and a disciple of St. John. It would be in a

* In the following appeal to the testimony of the ancient fathers, I enter, it is owned, on a beaten subject; but when objections are repeated, and urged with confidence, some reply is necessary, that the adversary may not boast. All I could hope or propose, was to add a few gleanings to ampler harvests that have been gathered before me; to search out and enforce any fresh matter or evidence; and where it should be necessary to call in something that others had said before, to be shortest where they had laboured most; or by new and pertinent circumstances to give a different cast and turn to it; and particularly to carry down the proofs by a continued uninterrupted line of the best and most unexceptionable witnesses, from the writing of the books, to a period when they were so universally spread, so thoroughly known, so assiduously studied, so constantly read in their public assemblies, and, in a word, so cautiously watched, as to shut out any danger of corruption.

manner

manner to draw out an index, if I were to specify the particular passages from the New Testament, in the small compass of the remaining epistles of each of these venerable fathers. It may be sufficient to observe, that in the epistle of St. Polycarp to the Philip-
pians, tho' no long one, but in which breathes the spirit of truth and every virtue, we find citations out of no less than ten different books of the New Testament, and some of those books quoted several times. The witnesses hitherto produced are such as lived with, and were trained up by, the apostles; and none of these can, without absurdity, be supposed ignorant either what were the books received in the church, and admitted to be inspired, or whether they were genuine and uncorrupted. The zeal of them all to prevent corruption is evident from their epistles; and Polycarp particularly set himself with great assiduity to oppose at Rome, the madness of the great

Only St. Clement's first epistle hath been appealed to above, because learned men, both in earlier and modern times, have been divided in their judgment upon the genuineness of the latter. The same must likewise be acknowledged of the epistle of St. Barnabas, for which reason neither the one nor the other are called in here, as our adversaries would of course protest against the evidence. However they who believe them authentic (and these are generally thought by the abler judges to have the fairest reason on their side) have the satisfaction of seeing in them further attestations from apostolical men, to the authority of the Gospel books, by the passages they cite out of them.

impostor

impostor Marcion^a. So far then as to the martyrdom of this excellent man^b. We may rest satisfied, the genuine Scriptures were received and used in the Church, while the apostles and apostolical men governed it. Let us go on with our inquiry somewhat further; the times of Justin Martyr coincide with the latter part of the life of the aged Polycarp, whom he survived near 20 years^c. In the few of his genuine works which are come to our hands, are numerous quotations out of St. Matthew's Gospel, and others from the rest also; and from some of St. Paul's epistles, and one from St. John's Revelation. Irenæus succeeds next, a disciple of Polycarp, and who, thro' his whole life retained the deepest love and veneration for that his master, and had his doctrine, his manners, his life, most strongly impressed on his heart^d. Him we find expressing his notion of the Gospels by

^a See Cave's Lives of the fathers, under Polycarp, § 5.

^b This, fixed at the shortest account, comes down to the year of Christ 147.

^c Usher, Cave, and others, have brought down the martyrdom of Polycarp, even lower than that of Justin. But bishop Pearson hath shewn this to be a mistake. Vid. Dissert. Chron. part II. c. xiv. ad c. xx. or Fabricius in Polycarp; or Wake's Apostol. fathers, in Prelim. discourse, p. 79.

^d See a fragment of an epistle of Irenæus to Florinus, at the end of his works, p. 463.

*Firmitas evangeliorum**, the unshaken truth of the gospels; and he immediately names the authors of those gospels, to which he gives this high character; adding at the same time, that there were neither more gospels in number, nor fewer than the four he had just mentioned*. In the beginning of the same book, after giving the names there also of the four evangelists, he makes this observation upon two of them, that St. Mark delivered to us in writing what he heard St. Peter preach, and St. Luke in like manner what was preached by St. Paul, and ratifies the authority of all, with this declaration, that whoever refuses his belief to them, despises *participes Domini*; i. e. the men who had the spirit of the Lord imparted to them; nay, that they despised Christ and the Father. As to the other books there are numerous quotations made by him from the Acts, from all or most of the Epistles, and the Apocalypse also. Clement of Alexandria must, on this occasion, be attended to, as the most learned of all the fathers, and the disciple of the celebrated Pantænus; the authority, no doubt, of the master, would have confirmed what hath been urged, as he wrote many commentaries on the Scriptures,

* It may be needless to say we give the old Latin version here, the original Greek being lost in this place, as in very many others of this author.

* Iren lib. iii. ch. xi. p. 220.

but nothing of them is come down to us; we have, however, ample amends in the large and laborious work of the disciple. A false doctrine was pleaded in his time, from a pretended discourse betwixt Christ and Salome, related in the Gospel of the Egyptians; in answer to which he invalidates the doctrine founded upon it, by shewing the story wanted authority, and therefore could not itself authorise any new doctrine; and the former of these he grounds upon this reason, that not one of the four Gospels gave the least countenance to any such story. Here we see the four Gospels are the last resort, and the test of evangelical history. Nor was any of the other books without a regard paid to it, as occasion offered. Passages, as we observed under the instance of Irenæus, are cited out of all; and long and numerous ones from very many; so that nothing can be plainer than that, at the time of these two fathers, there either had been a formal settled canon for the use of the universal church (and this is the most probable, tho' we know not when, or by what synod or council this was done) or that the faithful were so generally agreed upon the books to be received for inspired, that there was no contest about them^b.

Thus

^b Some exception indeed, to this agreement in judgment, must be admitted as to one of the books, the nature of whole

Thus we have carried on an uninterrupted succession of witnesses, without the least void from St. John, to about the 20th year of the third century; witnesses that enjoyed the fullest lights and means of knowing the truth, and such unblemished integrity, that truth was dearer to them than all things; so superior to the world, its interests, and pleasures, under so constant love and fear of the just and holy God, and, with all this, of such steadiness and confirmed fortitude, as to be ever ready to suffer, or to die, rather than to desert their duty. If such evidence is not a sufficient ground of belief, we may sit down with declaring, that all men are knaves, and ourselves will believe nothing. It is not to be doubted, that in the times we have been speaking of, many synods had been held, as neither is it, that after Valentinus had written, and vended amongst his disciples his false gospel, and Marcion had corrupted and mangled a true one, this would be censured, and might probably lead to drawing up a catalogue or canon of their genuine Scriptures; but no acts of such synods are now remaining, nor any ecclesiastical historian of those early times to give us an account. It was, however, the

whose subject, and the peculiar obscurity of it, occasioned it's being much less dispersed at first, and so much less known, and consequently requiring afterwards more time and examination into the evidence of it. But I shall have occasion to say more of this soon.

judgment of bishop Beverege, and the generality of learned men agree with him in it, that the apostolical canons, at least a greater part of them, were canons of particular synods held about the end of the second century, or the beginning of the third, and collected afterwards before the end of the third; and, for their greater reverence, set forth with the name of Apostolical canons^c. In these canons it is enjoined, that all Christians, whether clergy or laity, should be furnished with the venerable and holy books, the titles or names of which are there recited^d; the difference from our own is small, and easily accounted for. Into that catalogue were received the Epistles of Clement, and the Apostolical Constitutions, both which we exclude, and the Revelations of St. John are excluded, which we receive^e. It cannot be doubted but Polycarp knew whether this last were the genuine work of his own beloved master; as neither can it, whether, in a case of such concern,

^c Vide Cod. Can. vindicat. cap. ii. § 1.

^d Can. 85. or last.

^e The reader will observe that I am speaking only of the books of the New Testament.

^f The epistles of Clement were at that time read in churches, out of regard both to their own matter, and their author, as a fellow labourer with the apostles; upon which accounts they are placed here; however, not being deemed inspired, they are omitted in the next catalogue upon record, which is in the council of Laodicea, canon the last.

Justin M. his cotemporary, and Irenæus his disciple, knew it from him. We needed not indeed here again to call in their testimony, but that there is something particular in it which was not remarked by us before. Justin then, tho' he quotes not the special words, yet clearly, and beyond all danger of being misunderstood, gives the sense of what he refers to; he confirms the truth of what is said there from the person and character of the author; that it was John who wrote it, and to prevent his being misrepresented, as speaking of another John called the Presbyter, and to whom the Apocalypse was, by some, falsely ascribed, it is expressed that he was one of the apostles of Christ; and the contents or matter of the book he is there said to prophesy from a revelation vouchsafed to him^a. But in Irenæus the evidence is still stronger, as he not only lived in the age of Polycarp, but was his disciple, and so could not but know from him the truth of this matter. Here we find frequent appeals to the Apocalypse, denoting the author by name, and with the characteristic circumstance of his being the disciple of the Lord^b: In other places it is called in also in proof of doctrines^c, which was the highest attestation to a book as canonical or inspired.—

^a Vide Justin. Dial. cum Tryphon. p. 315. ed. Thirlby.

^b Irenæ. lib. v. c. 26.

^c Ibid. lib. iv. c. 37. atque alibi.

It were easy to bring down the attestations lower; but it may suffice to add, that, as the ablest and wisest men in the Church, before Irenæus, acknowledged the Revelation to have been written by the apostle St. John, and therefore of divine authority; so all along after it, such as were most able to examine into this matter, and most likely to know the truth of it, did all continue to make citations out of it, with the same veneration and regard, as they would from the most undisputed of their Scripture Books, down to the time when it was admitted into the canon, and so had the public seal of the church affixed to it, in testimony to the authenticity of it. But upon what reason then, after so fair a character, and from such unexceptionable witnesses as we have represented them, are we to account for it's so long wanting a more honourable and public rank? The most obvious cause, and universally assigned, is the peculiar obscurity of the book, partly arising from the nature of it's subject, as a prophecy, and partly from the manner of expression, and style of it, involved in figures and a darker language suited thereto. Now this itself did of course occasion it's being much less dispersed at first, and so much less known, and consequently in after-times intelligence about it would be more difficultly obtained; more time, more assiduity, more difficult examination of the evidence, became necessary; above all, I apprehend the less moment

moment and concern of the book to the uses and exigencies of the church at that time, would abate the general attention to it. The great principles of faith and practice they had in their other books; almost the whole of this looked to future times; and the main ends and uses of the prophecies in it, could not take place till upon or after their accomplishment^k. These were reasons that determined the prudence of the Church not to adopt it into the offices of their worship; and good men charitably left each other to further inquiry, and maturer deliberation. Yet it was long before all difficulties were got entirely over; the precise time of it's admission into the canon, it will not be easy to determine; it is supposed not till about the end of the fourth, or the beginning of the following century, when the matter having been fully and calmly considered, men's minds, by a removal of objections and doubts, became reconciled to it, and the dangers that once threatened them from their enemies, on account of the subject of the book, were, by Christianity becoming the settled religion of

^k Grotius assigns two other causes, which have their weight, and must not be omitted; to wit, the fear of irritating the Romans, by exposing them too much; nothing being more clearly predicted in the book, than the miseries of Rome, threatened in the downfall of the Roman empire; and the ill use made of it by Cerinthus, and other vain and unstable men.

the state, taken away. It was necessary to give this inquiry so full scope, and to reason at large upon the weight of its external evidence, considering the turn of our adversaries, who are apt to make light of any other. But if they could lay aside prejudice, and submit to cool and impartial examination, there remains an argument, which, waving every other, would, I may be permitted to say, be absolutely unanswerable. It is the actual completion of a large part of the prophecies contained in this book, than which, whether we consider the number, or the greatness of the things predicted, or their utter transcending all mortal foresight or discovery, together with their repugnancy to the ordinary course of events, and every human probability, there could not be a more invincible argument of a Divine original.

But to return to the other books of the Gospel code; I would here add to the several attestations produced, that they will be found most strongly to coincide with reason, and the nature of the case. The first preaching of the Gospel was attended with such supernatural power of evidence, and produced such strength of faith, as bore down, in upright minds, all worldly considerations. The interest of their souls, their love of Christ and each other, was to them all in all: When therefore the first Gospel was wrote by an apostle, and properly attested to be so, we cannot

not doubt either the zeal of those amongst whom it was written, to disperse it to their brethren, or the eagerness of them to whom it was sent, to read and study it with as much care and attention, as men generally make use of to understand and keep safe a grant of some eminent privileges, or the conveyance made to them of a large estate. It is not to be believed but that several of the other apostles must see and revise such Gospel; to suppose otherwise, is to suppose them slack in their office; careless of their flocks, and indifferent as to the salvation of their souls. The case was the same with the other Gospels; the deep sense in the first Christians of the inestimable mercies of Christianity, could not but make them desirous of knowing every thing that came from faithful hands, assuredly relating to it, and the author of it. The apostles particularly had the gift of *discerning of spirits*, and could not in such case be imposed upon; this must be a mighty check upon forgeries; and the case of Ananias and Sapphira makes it much more so. It is not therefore probable, that any other Gospels, which our enemies so vainly urge, did, in the time of the apostles, claim inspiration. Neither the Gospel according to the Hebrews, nor that according to the Egyptians (the two most famous we hear of) did any such matter; tho' the former of these being wrote in the language

language of the Hebrews at that time, and sometimes called the Gospel according to Matthew, might frequently be mistaken for the true St. Matthew. As to all the rest, they were probably upstarts of a later day; or, if otherwise, yet of no authority with any but weak and wicked men. Above all, it was impossible that the debasing the apostolical writings, and changing the rule of faith and manners contained in them, should be concealed from the watchful eyes of the apostles and apostolical men, and the integrity of great part of their flocks. One more argument I must subjoin here, of great moment indeed with myself, whether our adversaries will allow it any weight or not: It is the superintending wisdom and goodness of that Providence (no unconcerned spectator here) which neither slumbers nor sleeps. God, who communicated to the world the light of the Scriptures, by divinely inspiring those who wrote them, would, we need not doubt, be consistent with himself, and so far provide for the conservation of them, that they should not, as the Free-inquirer would needs have it, unavoidably, and from the nature of things, whether thro' the injuries of time, or the fraud and fault of men, be buried and lost, or rendered useless and insignificant, and so the mighty and merciful ends of God be utterly frustrate and defeated thereby.—I am not aware of more than one considerable instance

that may be alledged against what hath been advanced on this article of adulterations, and it is in the Ebionites, concerning whom the prevailing notion is, that as they received only the Gospel according to St. Matthew, so they miserably altered and corrupted it.—This particular article hath indeed already so much exceeded the length of any of the others, that I had thoughts of laying aside what follows upon it, at least of reserving it for a postscript; but, upon reconsidering this matter, and reflecting that the fact here to be examined, stands on the express attestation of an eminent father, from whose authority, however, some appeal, for reasons hereafter to be given, may in this instance be permitted, and the matter rested on another issue, I therefore thought it but a debt owing to my subject, to examine into it here, and that it might probably be clearer, and more satisfactory to the reader, to go thro' the whole upon this article at once. To which I would add, that I believed the greater attention due to the following instance, as Ebion broached his heresy several years before the end of the first century, when the sacred Books were highly concerned in their first well settling, and much danger to the credit of them might arise, from so early and daring an attempt upon them¹. The charge consists of

¹ This was at Pella, whither himself and great numbers of Christians, leaving Jerusalem, according to our blessed

of two parts, the first of which stands mainly on the authority of Irenæus, who affirms they received only the Gospel according to Matthew^m; but the latter part, which is the principal, is fetched from Epiphanius, who not only affirms their receiving that Gospel, and no other, but adds, that in their hands it was become both *νενοθευµενον και ηκρωτερας µορπον*, had spurious interpolations in some places, and was mutilated in othersⁿ. Eusebius and Jerom go into a different opinion; the former speaking of the Ebionites faith, they used the Gospel according to the Hebrews *only*^o; and the latter likewise that this Gospel was used

blested Saviour's warning, had retreated from the approaching vengeance which the Roman armies were speedily to execute upon that city, and amongst them, and in the region round about he propagated his errors. Epiphani. Hær. xxix. p. 123. The Alexandrine chronicle indeed refers the origin of this sect to the times of Trajan; but Pearson in Vind. Ignat. c. ii. in fin. item in c. v. and Bishop Bull, as I find him quoted from his Judic. Eccles. Cathol. cap. ii. § 17. agree to place it, as is done above; and particularly Coteler says, "Ebionitarum ortus melius refertur ad tempora Johannis apostoli, quam ut in Chronico Alexandrino ad annum proximum a morte illius. In patribus Apost. Constit. Apost. lib. vi. cap. vi. in not. p. 333.

^m Ebionæi soló eo quod est secundum Matthæum Evangelio utuntur. Iren. lib. i. c. 26.

ⁿ Epiphani Hæres. xxx. p. 127, and 137, 138.

^o Ευαγγελιω δε μονω τω καθ' Εβραις λεγοµενω χρηµενοι, των λοιπων σµικρον εποιοουντο λογον. Euseb. Eccl. hist. lib. iii. cap. 27.

by

by both Ebionites and Nazareans^p. The learned Grabe, therefore, was induced on this authority, to conclude the Gospel according to the Hebrews, not to have been the same with the Gospel of St. Matthew, nor the work of the same author; tho', to procure it the higher veneration, it was sometimes called by them the Gospel according to Matthew, which artifice answered the purpose intended by it; for being written in Syro-hebræan, as the true St. Matthew's also was, it easily passed with many for his: And this was Dr. Grabe's opinion of the matter, at the time when he published his *Spicilegium*^q. But the same great man afterwards, upon comparing a fragment preserved in Jerom, out of the Gospel of the Nazareans or Hebrews, with another

^p Hieron comment. in Esai. lib. iv. cap. xi. ver. 2. Yet the reader must be warned here, that Jerom is too shifting, at least ambiguous in his account, for us to form any clear judgment of what he thought upon the whole of this matter. Dr. Grabe has very justly censured him, as in some places making the Gospel of the Nazareans a different thing from St. Matthew, and confounding them in others; however, thus much we may be sure of from what he hath said, that he thought favourably of the Nazarean Gospel, and knew of no such impious book vended for St. Matthew's Gospel, as Epiphanius charges on the falsification of the Ebionites, for in one of the places where he mentions his own translating this Gospel, in Comment. Matt. c. xii. ver. 13. it is expressly called by him the Ebionite, as well as the Nazarean Gospel, and he never speaks of it with censure, but rather with honour.

^q Vide vol. i. p. 15, &c.

out

in Epiphanius concerning the same matter, out of the Gospel of the Ebionites, found, it seems, such difference betwixt them, as induced him to believe the two could not be the same books, and therefore he thought himself bound to change the opinion he had embraced in the Spicilegium, and to say Eusebius and Jerom were to be considered as mistaken in their accounts, and that the judgment of Irenæus was to be adhered to, which limits the Ebionites to the Gospel of Matthew only*. There arose, however, here again, fresh difficulty, from the fragments cited out of the Gospel of the Ebionites, in which were related matters not to be met with either in St. Matthew, or any other of the canonical Gospels*. And to account for this, he supposes the Ebionites, tho' they received the Gospel of St. Matthew, yet to have greatly corrupted it, to make it suitable to themselves. Whether this change of opinion in the learned Doctor, was for the better, may be made a question; it is certain that the granting tamperings and adulterations of the sacred text upon slight authority or cause for the concession, can answer no good end; now supposing the Ebionite Gospel and the Nazarean to have been found to disagree, as al-

* Vide notam Grabii in Iren. p. 220.

* Epiphan. Hær. xxx. § 13. item apud Hieronymum.

ledged,

ledged, in one or more places, still this may be accounted for in another, and more likely way, it being both easier, and less hazardous, to alter and interpolate the Nazarean copies of a different book, which was chiefly in their own hands, and less watched than that of St. Matthew, universally dispersed, and publicly read in all the churches. We conclude therefore, that, as the Doctor promised to give his further thoughts on the subject, in a future edition of his *Spicilegium*, which yet, either thro' more important business, or some other accident, was not done, they who differ from him in their opinion, may be permitted to offer their reasons for their dissent.—The state of the case, as I have drawn it out above, for the satisfaction of the reader, comprises sundry particulars that enter not into my present design: All that is incumbent on myself here, is to shew the utter improbability that Ebion or his followers did mangle or adulterate the Gospel of St. Matthew, as it hath been charged upon them. And that the reader may be encouraged to go thro' an inquiry, not in it's own nature very engaging, he is desired to remember that it is of moment in it's consequences; not that, if the corruption were granted, the thing could reflect any discredit on the Sacred Books with reasonable and impartial men, unless it could be proved to have extended itself beyond the limits of Ebionitism, and to have infected the church itself; the contrary to which

which we have the fullest evidence of; but as falsifications and corruptions are frequently made a topic of exception and abuse upon Scripture, this so early an instance of such foul dealing, were it true, or but admitted to be true, could not fail of affording matter of insult to men, who flatter their own unbelief, and endeavour to sap the faith of others, with the inferences they would draw from even later interpolations. This I thought competent reason for entering into this inquiry, and the more, because, if the witness of Epiphanius cannot here be taken, then the fact alledged, remains supported only by vague opinion, without sufficient proof or attestation; for amongst the numerous writers that assert the fact of Ebionite adulterations, none carries the attestation to it higher than that of Epiphanius: Such a circumstance, one would think, cannot do less than raise some suspicion of error, in that otherwise venerable father, whose single authority, and that coming so late, can hardly be supposed enough to ascertain a fact of such a nature, at such a distance of time, against the universal silence of the preceding fathers, who were interested in the thing, and called upon by the subject, and by the ties of duty and charity, to take notice of it.—In the case of altering and falsifying the first inspired book of Christianity, and in the very times of one or more of the apostles, this must have been regarded as an attempt to crush it in it's tenderest infancy; it is incredible

dible that so impious and so dangerous a precedent should not have created a general alarm, should not have been faithfully specified in their books, by the good and able men of those times, and notified to the churches with singular abhorrence; whereas all the earlier accounts of the Ebionites are confined to the three following articles; first, the sinking Christ into a mere man, as the real son of Joseph by Mary; or at the best, as born of a virgin, yet not made of an higher than the perfecter angelic nature. 2dly, the retaining the Jewish law with the Christian; and 3dly, rejecting all other Gospels, except, as some express it, that according to Matthew, as others, that of the Hebrews or Nazareans. As to other pernicious doctrine, or corruption of theirs, none of the fathers from the time of Ebion to Epiphanius, which at a middle reckoning takes up the space of near three hundred years, yet, I say, no one of them remarks this instance of a villany, no less than an attack on the grounds and pillar of their Faith. We hear no protesting against it: Ignatius his cotemporary, tho' he mention not the name of him or his sect, (this being contrary to his rule, as himself informs us¹) yet had specially in his aim (as bishop Pearson

¹ Τα δε ονομαζα αυτων οντα απισα εκ εδοξε μοι εγγραφει·
αλλα μηδε γενοιτο μοι αυτων μνημονευειν μεχρις ε' μελανοησωσιν.
Epist. ad Smyrn. § 5.

hath shewn beyond reasonable doubt^a) the two grand articles of Ebion's heresy, viz. the denying the divine nature of Christ, and asserting the obligation of the Jewish law together with Christianity^w. But had he known any thing of his intruding a mangled and interpolated Gospel for the true St. Matthew, in support of these doctrines, how much more necessary had it been to censure such impiety, as poisoning the fountains, and grafting his own falsities into the word of God? We have only one epistle of St. Polycarp now remaining, in which the solicitude of that holy man, for the safety of the church, appears, and would most probably have engaged him to guard the Philippians he writes to, against so pernicious an attempt, if any such had been made in his time. It is true, he proceeds so far (§ 7.) as to mark out such men as did *μεθοδεύειν τὰ λόγια τοῦ Κυρίου*; but neither are the doctrines here charged upon them suited to the Ebionites, nor does *μεθοδεύειν* imply the introducing a new text, or interpolation of different matter, but an artful and sophistical way of glossing upon, and misconstruing or warping the old one to their own fancies or passions^x. Neither Irenæus, who wrote a

^a Vide Vindiciarum Ignat. part. II. c. iv.

^w Epist. ad Magnes. § 8.

^x In this latter sense, both the old version, and that of Coteler understood it.

professed

professed account of the several heresies, their doctrines and practices to his own times, and amongst these of the Ebionites, any where imputes to them, with their other impieties, this of adulterating Scripture^a; nor yet doth Tertullian, tho' under more special engagement thereto, if it might with truth be done, in his book de Præscrip. Hæret. § 37, 38, 39. where he is speaking professedly to the interpolations and forgeries of Hereticks; yet the Ebionite again escapes censure on this head, and only Valentinus, Marcion, and Apelles are censured; the last of whom, however, did not himself adulterate Scripture, but used only the adulterated books of Marcion, *ibid.* § 52.—'As to Origen, who is next, and who was the nicest inquirer, and best skilled of any man of that age in the originals, he is not only silent as to any such interpolation as is imputed to the Ebionites, (tho' he elsewhere expressly mentions their rejecting St. Paul's epistles^a) but has said what amounts to a full declaration against it, telling us in the passage we have had occasion to quote before^b, that he knew

^a The usual method of hereticks, according to Irenæus, was thus, *Falso scientiæ nomine inflati Scripturas quidam consilientur, interpretationes verò convertunt.* Adver. Hæret. lib. iii. c. xii. p. 231.

^a Justin Martyr, Cyprian, and Clemens Alexan. have not been called in, as they take no notice of Ebionitism at all; but the authors produced carry on the line of evidence, without any interruption.

^a Contra Cels. lib. v. p. 274.

^b *Ibid.* lib. ii. p. 77.

of none who had adulterated the Gospels, but the Marcionites, Valentinians, and Lucianists. Now the fact in question, if known at all, could not escape a man of his extensive learning and curiosity; would he then in a dispute with an able, a learned adversary, who had brought a general charge of falsifying their Scriptures against the Christians, make such a defence as, if it were not true, his adversary might have it in his power, from known and plain fact, to demonstrate the falshood of it. Let us now appeal to Eusebius of Cæsarea, from whom, as a professed historian, and in matters ecclesiastical, we may expect an exact account. He then, in a separate chapter, distinctly recites the special dogmata of the Ebionites, as their denying the Divine nature of Christ, and their joining the observance of the Jewish Law together with Christianity. After this he proceeds to their Scripture, his account of which is, that they rejected the epistles of St. Paul, (which was, however, a very different thing from corrupting or interpolating them) and admitted only the Gospel according to the Hebrews^c. Now if by this he meant nothing but an adulterated copy of St. Matthew's gospel, and that corrupted by themselves, where was the judgment, or even faith, of this celebrated historian to pass it over without notice, and neither in justice to

^c See above, at page 268.

the evangelist, nor in charity to others, that might be misled by it, to bear witness against it.

Thus we have brought this evidence down to the point of time that was proposed; for Epiphanius was born more than thirty years before the death of Eusebius. To the kind of proof arising therefrom, it will possibly be excepted, that the evidence is only negative, and in part it is so; but surely Origen's is somewhat more; and as to the rest, there are so many corroborating circumstances, as amount to reasonable and sufficient proof. The silence here insisted upon could not proceed from *forgetfulness* of a thing known; it was the negative evidence, not of a single person, but was universal; it was not only for a short space, but for a succession of several ages; it could not be for any by-end of interest or credit, for, had there been the falsification that is since alledged, their own justification called aloud upon them to declare the fraud, as the depositaries and guardians of these sacred books: The honour of God, by whose inspiration they were given, and that holy religion that was to be maintained by the purity of them, do all conspire to confirm us in the belief, that these wise and holy fathers knew not of any such matter.

But what then must we say to so express testimony, as that in Epiphanius (vide Hær. xxx. § 3.) where he affirms the Ebionites received no Gospel but that according to Matthew, and

called it the Gospel according to the Hebrews; and in § 13. says further, that they did not admit it *ὅλον και πληρῆστον*, whole and in it's fulness, but, as we have above quoted him, *νενοθευμένον και ηκρωτερισμένον*, and then produces a long interpolation, of which there is nothing in the true St. Matthew. This is full and explicit, and yet, when we oppose to it the total silence of the fathers, thro' a long course of years; when we attend to the testimony produced from Origen, out of his book against Celsus; when we add the frequent and proper opportunities which the earlier fathers had to take notice of such fraud; when their subject not only led to it, but required it of them; when we examine the passages produced by Epiphanius as interpolated, and find them bear little, if any relation to the Ebionite errors, the support of which one would think must have been the chief end of any foul dealing^d; When we consider that if
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^d See the extracts in Epiphanius, (Hær. xxx. sections 13, 14. and 23. (where, amongst other things, we are told, that leaving out the genealogy, they begin with the account of John's preaching; thus cutting off the whole two first chapters; supposing this, some end indeed might be answered, especially to the ranker sort of Ebionites, who affirmed Jesus to be mere man, the son of Joseph; and yet it comes not up to the charge laid against them, as it implies not either change of the text, or interpolation. We find quotations likewise, and not very short ones, in St. Jerom, out of the Nazarean, or Hebrew Gospel, which
he

at the time that Irenæus affirms the Gospel of the Ebionites to be the *π κατά Ματθαίου*, this very Gospel of St. Matthew, abused and interpolated, had been the thing intended by him, he can never be believed to have spoke with such indifference about it, much less is it probable, that he, whose special business it was, and the subject and end of his whole book, to discover and refute the errors and forgeries of hereticks, and who particularly recites the Judaism of the Ebionites, and their denying the divine nature of Christ, should either neglect to inform himself about so essential a point as their rule, which ought to guide all the rest, or could omit to give the reader intelligence and warning of it^e; when, I say,

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he supposes to be the Gospel received and used by them; vol. I. in *Catalogo Script.* sub Jacobo, p. 346, 347: item in *Comment. Elai.* c. xi. ver. 2. p. 85, in vol. II. item *Comment. Matt.* c. xii. ver. 13. in vol. III. but the passages there produced, looked not at all like an after-game, or forgery, worth the hazard of the attempt, or answering any significant purpose that way, but rather appear to have been parts of an original narrative, that had been compiled from common tradition, and being mixed, as is usual in the telling of things from one to another, with men's own fancies and aggravations, were received by the compiler under no certain authority. Of this sort were, probably, the books which St. Luke had in his eye in the beginning of his Gospel, some one of which (most probably that according to the Hebrews) being more suited to the Ebionite humour, or more capable of being twisted to their opinions, and more easily and safely tampered with, was therefore adopted by them.

^e In other instances he failed not to give such intelligence;

we have laid these several things together, the plain consequence from them will be, either that the Ebionite Gospel could not be any of the four Gospels mangled and adulterated, but another book, whatever name it might assume; or if it was, that these corruptions were not intruded till later times, tho' somewhat before the age of Epiphanius; and in such case, it is certain that the canon of Scripture had been so long settled and ascertained, and the genuine copies so thoroughly known, and universally spread, that their falsifications could not prevail further than amongst themselves, but must have died with their sect, the church all along enjoying her own Scriptures, without any taint from them.—So far I have argued this matter on a supposition, which, in deference to the concurrent judgment of all the ancient fathers, must not hastily be superseded, to wit, that the Gospel of St. Matthew was originally wrote in Hebrew.—But

gence; thus when he saith of the Marcionites that they received St. Luke's Gospel, and some of St. Paul's Epistles, he takes care to inform us, what a Gospel, and what sort of Epistles they had made of them, how shamefully mutilated and corrupted. Vide Iren. in Marcio. & p. 231. In like manner, when he treats of the Valentinians, we are informed of their spurious and pernicious books, and the same of the Lucianists. Only it seems, in the case of the Ebionites, when the occasion for doing it was still more urgent, for the reasons already mentioned, yet not an hint or a word is seen of such attempt, much less that any such was executed by them.

should

should we suppose, as many learned moderns have done, that it was written by St. Matthew in Greek, and that the Hebrew copy is but a translation from it for the benefit of the Jews, the matter is this way brought to a short issue; the Greek was never pretended to be either corrupted or mutilated by the Ebionites, and whatever false play might be used by them, it was only on a translation, which the original must bear constant testimony against, and which therefore, after a time, sunk with it's patrons and advocates, whom it was intended mutually to defend, and be defended by them. Some reasons for my entering so minutely into this matter, I have mentioned in the beginning, and incidentally in the course of this Inquiry. I shall here in the close sum up the whole of them together.—Whilst the charge of interpolations, by Ebion and his followers, stands recorded in Epiphanius as just, it both adds to the number, and carries the impious practice much higher than what ought or could otherwise be done; and throws, what unbelievers will reckon no small advantage, into their hands, which they have no right to, and will be sure to make an ill use of. And yet I know not that this matter hath fallen under examination in the point of view which we have been considering it in, or that the particular question hath been discussed, whether Ebion and his sect can be justly charged with having corrupted one of the Gospels

Gospels of Scripture. On finding therefore this old and not unplaufible argument of interpolations, for derogating from the certainty of the books we receive as inspired, not only urged in the Free-inquiry, and in some earlier books written in the same spirit, but repeated with fresh insult in later attacks on Christianity, I sat down to examine how high the affair of interpolations could be carried, and whether it might be proved to have been either so early or so prevalent, as to render our Scriptures precarious and uncertain. The result of an impartial enquiry hath been to confirm me in the fullest assurance that this confident argument from interpolations is a mere nothing; that there had not been any such corruption in the books of the Hereticks, as could make the purity and integrity of others in any measure justly suspected; that the real number of interpolators was nothing like so many as hath been imagined, nor so considerable; that the first instance alledged, and by far the most pertinent to the purpose, could it be supported, is grounded on an account, which there lies the utmost probability against, and which is as incredible, as any negative evidence, with the strongest circumstances confirming that evidence, can make a thing to be; that, if this instance fails, the time and circumstances of others do plainly indicate, it was utterly impracticable to transplant their frauds and interpolations into the books of the faithful;

ful; that even what passed under the name of interpolation was, for the greater part, much miscalled, it being rather, if we may believe Irenæus, false interpretation, and lying comments; that therefore the most daring attempts of hereticks, very rarely proceeded higher than not receiving a book, or part of a book, which they did not like; and lastly, that, after all, what interpolation there was of some Scriptures amongst Hereticks themselves, is so far from giving just suspicion of any infection derived into the books received by the church, that it was most eminently true of the attempts there were in that way, they did (as I think I have somewhere seen it observed of heresies in general) really contribute to the more effectually securing the genuine books, and the purity of them. Good men were thereby engaged to study them more assiduously and attentively, in order to refute the falsities of bad ones; and all sides were bound to keep a strict guard, that nothing unfair, nothing but what might be supported, should be pleaded by either against the other. And thus truth of course, under the favour and blessing of God, maintained it's ground, whilst fraud and fiction were detected and exploded.

This article of interpolations and forgeries seems to be far the most material of all the objections that are made to Christianity as a
written

written Revelation. Our faith stands on the word in the Holy Scriptures; if these Scriptures are now become an indiscriminate compound, and medley of truth and falshood, we believe we know not what; there is not a single article of Christianity we can be sure about; whence I trust that I cannot be deemed to have gone out of my way by reviewing this part of my subject, so much more particularly and minutely than any of the others.—The article of ignorance of transcribers, by which we are to understand *the multitude of various readings* caused thereby, was not considered by me in the order where the Free-inquirer has placed it; and will, more properly, be examined here, as it hath a near relation to the preceding article; for a various reading makes a change in the text of the copy where it is found; and altho', not being done with aim and design, it includes not the guilt of forgery, yet it hath been sometimes mightily pleaded against us, as if the text was rendered uncertain by it. It will not, however, detain us any long time, both because we think it of no such moment, as the frights of some people, and the evil wills of others, have represented it; but chiefly, because the most sensible and learned men have set this matter in so just a light, as effectually to dispel the alarm taken by our friends, and shew the impotence and ill-judgment

ment of our foes. Above the rest, Dr. Bentley^f, whose skill in these matters is beyond all exception, hath, with much penetration and accuracy, equal to his immense learning, entered very particularly into the subject of *various readings*, and proved even the use and benefit of them, in the hands of learned and discreet men, by restoring, out of one copy, what was defective or mistaken in another; and shewing, at the same time, the insignificance and futility of the several inconveniences or dangers supposed to follow from them. One argument from him I cannot deny myself the pleasure of mentioning, as it is *instar omnium*, and might be at any time itself decisive, since it refers the matter to the test of a fair and open trial. The Dr. avers, "the text of the sacred writers to be competently exact, even in the worst MS now extant; nor is one article of faith or moral precept either perverted or lost therein; choose as awkwardly as you can, choose the worst by design, out of the whole lump of readings^g." And again, "the most sinistrous and absurd choice shall not extinguish the light of any one chapter, nor so disguise Christianity, but that every feature of it will still be the same^h." If the Doctor's remark is just (and it has never been refuted) the dispute must end in

^f Phileleuth. Lips. § 32, &c.

^g Ibid. p. 69.

^h P. 76.

differences

differences of words, or modes of expression, in slight mistakes, and matters that carry no weight or consequence with them; and all our fears, and all the objections on this head, are impertinent. I shall leave this article with an observation, relating as well to the men who wantonly demand from God greater evidence of the truth of Christianity than he hath thought fit to give us, as to the Free-inquirer, who imputes such defects to all Revelation, and consequently to Christianity, as are inconsistent with any assurance of the divine authority of it; to wit, that Christianity holds forth to us proofs so strong and numerous, that the wisest and most careful men ever think themselves bound to be determined by incomparably less in any other the momentous affairs of their lives¹. And if this be a truth, we
have

¹ Where the subject is the truth and certainty of the Christian religion, it must be remembered that there are different kinds of certainty, suited to the nature of different things and cases, to wit, physical, mathematical, and what, in point of conduct and influence upon our actions, ought to have as great regard paid to it as the others, moral certainty. Such a certainty, as this last, is what God's providence hath appointed for a rule of judgment to us, and the guide of our conduct in far the greatest number of cases, and the most momentous in life. And where the subject is of such nature, as not to admit of other evidence, we are to require no more. The reasonableness of the thing, the fairest and fullest attestations to the truth of it, and such as afford no just occasion or room for doubt, and with these, the strongest suitable circumstances concurring to confirm it, all of which are seen in the instance of the

have infinite reason to infer another from it, that at the last day of accounts the question will be, not whether we have ever had experience of inspiration in ourselves, nor whether we have actually seen the dead raised before us, or had every other evidence our fancy called for; but whether we had what, in case our hearts were honest and upright, would not have failed to produce in us a sincere belief: By this, we may be assured, the unbelieving principle must be tried; and it may be, therefore, of more consequence than an unbeliever is willing to think, that he should know where to stop in his demands, and not, after all the evidence God hath vouchsafed him, to cavil at what he pronounces the weakness and insufficiency of it; above all, not to insult him with proud challenges, like that taunt of the Jews to our blessed Saviour, after the many gracious miracles he had wrought amongst them and for them, and amidst the agonizing tortures their ingratitude had then brought

the Christian Revelation, this is moral certainty. To which if we add, the assurance that God would maintain the order and course of his providence, and in so general, so important a concern, as his own glory, and man's happiness, would not suffer the highest moral evidence to be made the means of deceiving us; it is most plain and sure, that to pronounce that evidence too little, and incompetent to render it authentic, or to require from it a kind of demonstration, now unsuited to it, cannot be less than to fight against God, to act inconsistently with the order and nature of things, and the world our Maker hath placed us in.

upon him, "*Let him now come down from the cross and we will believe him.*"

After want of authenticity, the next article charged on Revelation is want of perspicuity, and in *moral matters* too^k (for it is on these the author lays the principal stress). Can then a man of his understanding so much as open his bible, and not see the iniquity of imputing any defect either of fulness or clearness in it's precepts. It is to the want of hearts to practise, and not of heads to understand, that we are to ascribe the immorality and prophaneness we lament in the Christian world. "Who-soever," saith our Saviour, "will do his will (the will of him that sent him) he shall know of the doctrine^l." We see, if we have but a will to do, we cannot want sufficient knowledge what is to be done; nay such a will shall carry us further than to bare morality, even to the knowledge and understanding of the saving doctrines of Christianity; so that it is really astonishing, the author could even think of making obscurity in the practical and moral duties a necessary ingredient in all revelation; yet this he does, and places it to the account of the general good, which required that some should sin and be punished for it; whence it became necessary, that the remedies against moral evil which God might devise, should not be so strong as to master it,

^k P. 174.

^l John vii. 17.

but the precepts be obscure, in order to give men room to transgress them, and that they might be able to resist the evidence and force of them^m. What is all this but *ægri animi somnia*, an heap of philosophical reveries! nothing being plainer than the Christian moral duties, nothing clearer than the sanctions in it of infinite rewards and punishments.

The last of the four grand defects, which he imputes to every revelation, and in a point necessary to attain it's ends, is want of policy. The author's own good sense will not permit him to maintain, that particular forms of government, the laws for the management of it, and the rights of war and peace, should have been prescribed thereinⁿ; and as to the rest, when he has been able to shew any doctrines of it, that lead to the disturbance or injury of society, or any defect in the summary of duties, necessary to peace and order, to justice and industry, to friendship and fidelity, to love and harmony in the world, to the true happiness of the state and its members, we shall think ourselves bound to acknowledge there is weight in his argument. But if, on the other hand, whoever follows the rule of life there intelligibly and plainly laid down, cannot fail of making, as his rank and station is, a good governour, or a good subject, a good friend, a good parent, a good

^m Vide Free-inquiry, p. 175, 176. ⁿ P. 177.

child; in a word, if I may be allowed to speak in the language of a Gentile moralist, an honest man, and a good citizen; or, as a Christian apostle spoke, *a perfect man, thoroughly furnished unto all good works*; if, I say, this be so, then certainly ought this author, in his turn, ingenuously to acknowledge, there is in Christianity no want of the best and truest policy.

To the preceding defects in every revelation the Inquirer adds another, p. 179. "that it must be very soon corrupted, and from that corruption be productive of the most mischievous effects." Two things are here supposed, neither of which are defensible. The first, that any Revelation God could give to mankind, must, from the nature and necessity of things, be soon corrupted; in this the author, by a strange mistake, puts the corruption of the rule, instead of the corruption of the men who professed that rule; for altho' Christians should depart from their profession, and become bad men, the rule is not thereby changed, but continues the same: The corruption therefore should lead us to look into the rule, and if that condemn the corruption, as Christianity certainly does, this is the defect of man, and not of the religion. The author's second supposition is, that a revelation thus corrupted must be productive of the most mischievous effects, whereas the Re-

2 Tim. iii. 17.

velation

velation is not corrupted at all: What then can be more contrary to all just reasoning, than, instead of imputing these ill effects to the wickedness of men, where only their true causes are found, to ascribe them to a religion, which encourages, commands, and enforces, with the most rational of all motives, the direct contrary?

I shall close these strictures with remarking the fate of the subject of the Free-inquiry, whether, in the hands of those who had no other guide but natural light, or of those who, having revelation, yet despised or rejected it. We find then, in all the accounts of this sad phænomenon, *evil in the world*, no efforts of mere human wisdom and sagacity have been able to fix on any method for it's entrance, without degrading man, or dishonouring God. Natural reason might, and did lead serious and honest minds to conclude God could not be the author of evil, and in this general conclusion they should have acquiesced; but on what particular occasion, by what special means, evil might be suffered to take place, nothing less than revelation could assure them. All else was impertinence, or darkness and confusion. Nor is this said at random; it is confirmed to us by a succession of known facts, from the most ancient philosophers, down to the author of the Free-inquiry. The sages of the East fell upon the shocking notion of two principles. Nor did

the reform in the reign of Darius Hystaspis, made by Zoroaster, at all help the matter; for though that philosopher, instead of two first causes, introduced a principle superior to both, that created under him light or good, which, he said, darkness or evil followed of consequence, as shadow doth a body: Yet here we are put off with a simile, instead of a proof; and that, if examined, no very pertinent one neither. For the comparison is, that as body intercepts light, and produces shadow, so there is something that intercepts good, and so is evil; but what it was that first intercepted good, and how, or on what occasion it was permitted to intercept it, it doth not at all help us to form any idea, though it was the thing to be shewn; and we are as much at a loss for the origin of evil as ever. Egypt, the rival of the East for wisdom, seems, in this instance, to have surpassed her, as she says so little about it; but if the Egyptians must be supposed, (and many do suppose it) to have entered into this matter at all, what we know of their doctrine about it is, that they called good, Osiris, and ascribed their good to him; and called evil, Typhon, attributing their evil to him, and yet probably, no more was at the bottom of all this, than, by a very common figure of speech, to represent qualities as persons, and not at all with any view to give the origin of evil. Philosophy soon took a wider range. The
genius

genius of Pythagoras rose, and struck out that intractability of matter, which our author has made the ground-work of his book; and almost all the philosophers that came after, ran into the same notion^p; particularly the Stoics asserted two principles, Mind, or God, and inert matter, out of which he formed the world; and the blemishes, or evils of it, are charged on the latter. The

^p Plato's opinion however on this subject is acknowledged so far from being clear, that learned men have been greatly divided upon it. Plutarch lists him into his own notion of an evil principle: *Eumenius apud Chalcidium* makes him, as well as Pythagoras, ascribe the origin of evil to the malignity of matter: Others dissent from both those authors, and produce his own words to shew he attributed it to necessity; and yet, after all, he explains not what he means by this necessity, any further than giving us to understand, it is a something which, of necessity, attends this our mortal nature, and the world we live in; and that it is impossible evils should be totally extirpated; for there is a necessity that there should always be something contrary to good, though it have no place amongst the Gods. *Αλλ' ἐτ' ἀπολεῖται τὰ κακὰ δύνατον, ὡς Θεοδωρεῖ. (ὕπιναντιον γὰρ τι τῷ ἀγαθῷ αἰεὶ εἶναι ἀνάγκη) ἐτ' ἐν θεοῖς αὐτὰ ἰδρυμένη τὴν δὲ διήτην φύσιν καὶ τοῦδε τοῦ τόπου περιπολεῖ ἐξ ἀνάγκης.* Plat. Theæt. p. 176, Ed. H. Steph. 1578. Whence this necessity arises we are, the reader sees, still left in the dark, unless he intended matter by it, in this place, as he certainly did in some others. So many occasions as Plato had to speak of natural and moral evil, he could not be supposed to have done it so slightly, if he had any clear idea of it; it is much more probable he felt his own weakness here, and found the subject too remote, and the ground he went upon too slippery, for him to speak more plainly, or more fully about it.

confidence and stiffness of this sect was not likely to be an advantage to them in the investigating so remote a truth, yet they were consistent in their error; they followed it to its consequences, and as it was too obvious to reason, that God could not be supposed to create and give matter such qualities as should exceed the management of his own almighty power, they were driven to the necessity of admitting it to have been eternal, as nothing less could render it's intractability insuperable. Aristotle, and his followers, taught the existence of the world to have been, much as we see it, from eternity, by a necessary efflux from the Deity, which they explained by comparing it to the light of the Sun, necessarily flowing from it, and coeval with it.

The Pyrrhonists and Epicureans are out of the question, and many others, differing more in name than reality; they that either supposed every thing to be chance, or denied there was any such thing as truth or falsehood, right or wrong, in the world; they whose folly or madness admitted no God but nature, another name for the *παν*, or the universe; and they who affirmed matter to be the only substance, and the only God in the world, all these (and these, wild as they are, have all had their run in their time) either confound all distinction betwixt good and evil, or at best admit no more than what the magistrates and the laws give them: upon the foot of reason,

no further or better progress was made in the Gentile world, when, on the promulgation of Christianity, the ends of the creation, the terms on which man stood with his Maker, and the history of the fall, became wider and better known; and enquirers that were not too proud to learn, or too prejudiced to be convinced, were soon made sensible of the mighty preference, in point of perspicuity, justice, and equity, due to the Scripture account; yet in this happy state of light and knowledge, still the ambition of some turbulent men, who called themselves Christians, fond of being distinguished, and confident of their own strength and sagacity, would needs leave the clue, their faithful guide, the Holy Scriptures, had put into their hands. Some Philosophers, it is owned, who held out against Revelation, though in the full day of it's light, yet, in this instance, made their advantage of it. They saw the absurdity and incompetence of the accounts of their predecessors, and prudently took up the opinion of the abuse of free-will, tho' they had not the ingenuity to own how they came by it. Particularly Maximus Tyrius, in his 25th dissertation, Πόθεν τὰ κακά; tho' he derives physical evils from the depravity of matter, yet fetches moral evil from the soul itself; and this he illustrates by an allegory so just and strong, that I may presume on the reader's candour, if I give the substance of it

below¹. Amongst an herd of other false teachers², Hermogenes, peculiarly on this article, would be wiser than his Bible, and set up for himself; and what was the consequence? why, to the shame of his reason and his cause, he could find nothing better than to take up with the old notion of the intractability, and consequent absurdity, of the eternity of matter. Manes figured after; but his madness and impiety disdained so poor a thing as inert, insensible, intractable matter; nothing less than an active, intelligent, eternal, and essentially evil principle, corival in power and knowledge to God, could be admitted by him. Such palpable dregs of rankest heathenism, blended by wicked and foolish men with Christianity itself, strongly shews the mighty consequence of fixing the origin of evil right,

F ¹ God set the soul to preside over this earthly body as a charioteer over his chariot, and putting the reins into his hands, gave him liberty to guide and direct it through life, having first imparted to him strength and skill to do this, but at the same time liberty to misapply that skill thus imparted to him. The good soul, remembering it was God who committed to him the car, and the governance of it, takes the reins into his hands, directs it's course, and curbs in the heat and impetuosity of the steeds, that, unless kept under proper discipline (which wicked souls neglect to do) leave the track of virtue, and madly hurry on chariot and charioteer, into the several defiles of intemperance, ambition, avarice, or other vice or folly, as the spirit and temper of the steeds, that is, as the turn and bent of their passions, should lead them.

² Marcion, &c.

and

and especially when an opinion, so shocking to all sense and goodness, could so far prevail upon the vices and follies of men, as to spread it's poison, and hold up it's head thro' a long course of years. However, at length, this matter, at least disputes about it, slumbered for ages; arms, or servile superstition, gave the pride, or humours of men, other employment. The celebrated Monsieur Bayle, after some others of meaner note, called it forth from it's obscurity, and gave it a new colouring; but professing at the same time, a design only to shew where the strength of Manicheism lay, and how far it would go. The Free-inquirer, in his scheme, does not think himself under any necessity to make apologies, or shew any solicitude about what may be thought of his reasonings or sentiments, or any desire to be believed other than serious. But being neither satisfied with the Scripture-account, nor acquiescing in what the philosophy of some, or fancy or frenzy of others, had said before him, hath, as we have seen, himself struck out a scheme, in which some resemblance is kept up to former adventurers, by his assuming, with the philosophers, the intractability of matter as the spring and origin of evil, and setting it up in a manner, as another principle, by supposing it to limit even the power of God in the order and constitution of the universe. Thus he begins upon the old foundation; yet his system soon takes
another

another form, shews a plan that was never drawn by any before him: One difficulty indeed he directly discharges from his scheme, which they that went before him in the notion of intractability thought inseparable from it. I mean the eternity of matter, and yet another rises out of his own account, which is the absurdity and contradiction of supposing God either should or could make a thing that would controul his almighty power, or which he should be under any other restraint from controuling than that of his own wisdom. But his peculiar dogma, and what is not only more eminently his, but was never any man's before him, is his way of deducing the necessity and origin of moral evil, it's ends and uses, all which he recommends as the surest and truest way to justify the Deity from the natural evils and miseries we see in the world, a very unpromising course surely, of clearing up one article of religion, by a method which, we have shewn, very highly injures and endangers the whole, dishonouring the wisdom, the power, and the goodness of God, under the pretext of accounting for a difficulty which he found infinitely better accounted for to his hands. We may observe then, in the historical deduction here given, the evil tendency of all merely human devices upon the subject. The supposed intractability of mat-

Vid. Lect. IV. & alibi passim.

ter confirmed the belief of the eternity of it, and the doctrine of the two principles led to the most flagitious turpitude and licentiousness. The Free-inquirer professes to aim at, and we suppose does intend, better things; yet he will permit us to pay impartial attention to the natural consequences of his own doctrine. It may make the stronger impression on the mind, if we set here in one view, a summary of the chief of his dangerous positions, tho' already considered separately at large. There is then infinite danger to bad men from being taught, *That God is the author of sin: That the world he has made is such, that it is necessary for it's good, that some should be wicked in it: That God sent beings into the world for this end and purpose, that some of them might do evil, and suffer evil here, and be degraded more, and suffer more when they passed into their next estate: That the share of free-will, which they have, was given them by God principally for his own vindication, and that they might make themselves proper objects of misery: That, if God had thought fit to make bad men with the same heads, and the same hearts which he hath given to the most virtuous, they would all have excelled in the same virtues.*

* He does not always speak so harshly, yet it cannot be denied that he frequently does; and to say he does not mean this, is to charge contradictions upon him.

* Vid. Free-Inquiry, *ibid.*

which

which will infallibly be looked upon as resolving virtue and vice into original constitution, as much as any thing can do; what is it but telling them, good men cannot *fall from*, nor bad men rise out of, their natural dispositions, without the extremest difficulty; for himself adds, *that those dispositions, either way, are scarce ever, if at all, defeated*? Can we imagine that men ill-disposed will not interpret all this into fatality? and what can we think the event of such a belief must be, but to drive them into the most desperate courses, and encourage them to acquit themselves, and charge their own wickedness and folly upon God Almighty? Once more, and that I may shut up these remarks. In the history above, we see the issue of all the greatest efforts which man's unassisted reason hath formed to account for the origin of evil; nor is the last attempt at all likely to succeed better than the rest. This, or any other schemes, however wit or ingenuity, favoured by men's fondness for their passions, and a desire to assail themselves of the blame of indulging them, may hold them up for a season, yet they either die with their novelty, or in time sink under their own weight, not having any thing solid to support them, and being directly opposite to all that hath: whereas the Bible, as it contains the first, and incomparably the oldest account in the world, of man and his

* Vid. Free-Inquiry, *ibid*.

nature, so it has stood the test of every age. Human understanding, having once left Scripture, finds nothing able to give it satisfaction till it comes to Scripture again; there the matter still rests firm upon it's own foundation; and there, we need not fear, it will rest, the account it gives being highly rational, and amply authoritative; but all other accounts, from the first to the last, without probability, and without authority.

POSTSCRIPT

POSTSCRIPT.

THE Reader may perhaps marvel, that, having paid so particular attention to other obnoxious parts of the *Free-Inquiry*, I should take no notice at all of the contempt with which *sacrifice* or *vicarious punishments* are there spoke of. An Appendix to a sermon on *Justification* by the author of these remarks, and published a few years since, was written principally to obviate what the *Free-Inquirer* hath said on this article; and therefore it was not thought necessary to resume the subject here. However, on mature reflexion, I thought it not improper to add a few further observations upon it.

In the first place then, the reasoning of the *Inquirer* on this branch of his subject goes entirely on a false measure, in forming his judgment upon the case without taking in any of the lights which revelation affords us; regarding it barely in the general view of an *innocent person punished for the guilt of a sinner*; which, certainly abstractedly considered, and without the plan upon which the Deity proceeded in this grand transaction,

carries

carries the face of much obliquity and injustice. But if we look into Scripture, another scene appears,

“*Major rerum mox nascitur ordo.*”

Yet let not the Deist take alarm here, as if I were drawing him in to submit to the authority of a revelation which he doth not acknowledge. The present question is not, whether Scripture itself is sufficiently authorised; nor whether the account given in it of the ransom was really fact, though ourselves most firmly believe both; but the Inquirer's exceptions lead us only to consider what the account is which Scripture gives of it, and whether there arises any apparent injustice or obliquity on the supposition of it; we will then view it a little more distinctly. It was not, we find there, a random scheme to absolve sinners without their doing any thing for themselves; it was not a delivering up a righteous Redeemer to misery and death for the sin of others, without a glorious resurrection, for his own righteousness. The aim and end of the amazing oeconomy was the renovation of fallen man, and his restoration to the divine favour: The means were a ransom paid and man sanctified: The consequent a demonstration both of the justice and of the goodness of God. Such is the Scripture account. The matter objected to, is the sacrifice or vicarious punishment as such; for the ransom was vicarious.

carious. Now if there were any thing faulty in this, it must be either because it was unjust to some of the parties concerned; or because it was unwise and absurd in the nature of the thing; and on both these the Inquirer grounds his charge. Let us first speak to the injustice alledged: the parties concerned were the three following; the innocent sufferer; the guilty; and the person injured: in respect to the innocent sufferer, it is a known maxim, that no injury is done to the person who voluntarily takes the suffering upon himself, which was the case here: as to the guilty, they suffered no injury from such dispensation; their part in it is privilege and benefit conferred, the obtaining forgiveness, and the blessings of it. The remaining party is the person to whom the injury was done, and offence given: but if all the compensation was made which he desired, and was perfectly satisfied with, it might indeed be mercy and goodness in him to accept it, but it could never be injustice done to him.

But how shall we get over the absurdity of the thing? "There is no manner of connection", we are told, "between the miseries of one being, and the guilt of another"; there is, according to some men's notion, a natural unfitness and incongruity in the case; a transgression against reason, and the relation of things, as the punishment reach'd

not those who deserved it; and still the more unjust by being laid upon him who deserved it not; from all which they pronounce that the party offended should either have inflicted it on the delinquent himself, or no where at all. — But there lies a great fallacy at the bottom of all such reasoning; for though God was disposed to receive fallen man into favour, yet it might not, it is plain from the event, it was not fit and proper to do it, without some signal mark of God's displeasure at the offence committed. As an example to the world, as a debt to God's justice, for the honour of his laws, and for an assurance to all men that God is and must be an avenger of all that obey unrighteousness, an atonement was indispensably required; a ransom must be paid; yet man was not able to pay it himself; and where is the absurdity, or rather in such an emergence, how adorable the wisdom and mercy of the Redeemer, that he should come down from heaven and take flesh upon him, should exhibit the most perfect pattern of humility, patience, holiness, and universal obedience to all his followers; should at length pay to the Father our full ransom by his death on the cross, and thereby also give the world the utmost possible assurance of God's abhorrence and avengement of sin, and so deter men from future disobedience, inasmuch as he spared not his

own beloved Son, though barely the substitute of sinners? In all this we see God's justice cleared; the honour of his laws asserted; obedience from ourselves enforced; his mercy displayed by accepting the atonement; his holiness demonstrated in making the amendment of the ransomed the condition of their reaping the blessings of it; and, what is the accomplishment and crown of all, the Redeemer himself, having endured the cross, and despised the shame, is instated in glory, and sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high.

It may be requisite for me to say something of the motive which engaged me to publish these remarks so late after the appearance of the *Free-Inquiry*; especially as it was followed by a sensible and candid answer.—The spirit of Infidelity still continuing to run high, and insults on Christianity to be frequently renewed, particularly on the sacred books, and the authority of them, this prompted me to join my own endeavours to obviate the wanton licentiousness. And I was the more induced to examine the bold things advanced in the *Free-Inquiry*, as I know not any book that in so small a compass contains the principal matters which make the ordinary topicks of libertine merriment; and is drawn up with such elegance and art of pleasing deception,

POSTSCRIPT.

307

as to carry with it much danger to ill-disposed or volatile minds, who concern themselves not so much about the solidity of the reasoning, as the palatableness of it.

FINIS.

ERRATA.

- | <i>pag.</i> | <i>lin.</i> | |
|-------------|-------------|---|
| 83. | 4. | for wit, r. to wit, |
| 89. | 4. | for to r, too and for too r. to |
| 109. | 10. | before the punishments, r. yet |
| 144. | 2. | after it. r. a comma, instead of a period. |
| 149. | 5. | after given, add (I mean of an eventual accom-
plishment.) |
| Ibid. | 9. | after necessary; add here, |
| 153. | 3. | for even r. ever |
| 154. | | In the note, for 1 Cor. vi. 8. r. 1 Cor. vi. |
| 162. | 16. | before absolutely insert only |
| 207. | | In the note, for Mark xv. 16. r. Mark xvi. 15. |
| 234. | 23. | for his adversary, r. Celsus, And in the note of
that page, for <i>opuaidi</i> r. <i>opuaidi</i> |
| 239. | 2. | for Homero-cantones, r. Homero-centones, |
| 240. | 4. | of the note, after <i>and</i> r., instead of a comma, make
a full stop. |
| 250. | | In the note, for 236. r. 234. |
| 256. | 2. | after man. make a comma, instead of a period. |
| 259. | 6. | for such r. of such |
| 276. | 5. | for a dispute with r. refuting |
| Ibid. | 9. | for his adversary r. any one |
| 279. | 5. | In the note, for looked r. look |
| 281. | 3. | for is r. was |
| 289. | 6. | for Christian r. Gospel |

